ANTHONY KALDELLIS

The Christian Parthenon

Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens

CAMBRIDGE

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Byzantine Athens was not a city without a history, as is commonly believed, but an important center about which much can now be said. Providing a wealth of new evidence, Professor Kaldellis argues that the Parthenon became a major site of Christian pilgrimage after its conversion into a church. Paradoxically, it was more important as a church than it had been as a temple: the Byzantine period was its true age of glory. He examines the idiosyncratic fusion of pagan and Christian culture that took place in Athens, where an attempt was made to replicate the classical past in Christian terms, affecting rhetoric, monuments, and miracles. He also reevaluates the reception of ancient ruins in Byzantine Greece and presents for the first time a form of pilgrimage that was directed not toward icons, Holy Lands, or holy men but toward a monument embodying a permanent cultural tension and religious dialectic.

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Frontispiece Perikles on the Pnyx, justifying the Akropolis expenses (1928).

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Preface

This book unveils for the first time a nearly 1,000-year-long chapter in the history of the Parthenon and the city of Athens, namely the Byzantine phase of their existence. Studies of the post-classical Parthenon have so far focused on the travelers of early modern Europe,[1] and strongly imply or state that nothing of any deep cultural or philosophical significance happened during the Byzantine era, indeed that it *could not* have happened because the Byzantines did not have the same relation to the classical past as do the Europeans. The result has been an appropriation of the Parthenon as a defining monument of the modern West and a denial of it to others, especially Byzantium. But this study argues, on the basis of extensive evidence assembled and, in some cases, uncovered here for the first time, that after antiquity Athens and the classical legacy that it still represented in the minds of many Byzantines did not vanish from the stage of history as has been asserted. The Parthenon, converted into a church, became an important site of pilgrimage whose fame spread throughout the Christian world. Yet contrary to the modes of Byzantine piety, what attracted pilgrims and adoration were not any sacred relics or icons that were kept there but rather the Parthenon itself, the building, whose classical past was known and, indeed, quite visible. Christian devotion was here engaged in a direct and continuous dialogue with antiquity, in the very seat of its classical greatness. The building was even believed to have mystical properties: a divine light emanated within or from its ancient marble walls. It some cases, it is difficult to know whether honor was being directed at the church or the Mother of God to whom it had been reconsecrated. Certainly, the Parthenon had never received this kind of attention in antiquity itself. It was now honored by emperors, visited by saints, inscribed with the

[1] E.g., Norre (1966); Pavan (1983); Beard (2002); Yalouri (2001) is about modern Greece. The travelers themselves have their own specialized bibliography, e.g., Eisner (1991); Augustinos (1994); Giakovaki (2006).

names of many pilgrims, and praised by orators in glowing terms. The Theotokos Atheniotissa was famous in Rome, Constantinople, and the East. This book traces for the first time the Orthodox history of this classical monument and attempts to explain why and how it became so important in a pre-modern, pre-European Christian world. It is exciting and amazing that such discoveries can still be made.

Obviously, there are many interpretive frameworks into which this new history can be situated. One can, for instance, use the new textual evidence to supplement what has been the main (in fact, the only) direction of research on the Byzantine Parthenon so far, namely the archaeological. I have resisted this approach, first because I am no archaeologist and, second, because the textual evidence tells us different *kinds* of things than does archaeology and I want to uncover its own tensions and dynamics. One can also study this material from the standpoint of medieval Mariolatry, the adoration of the Mother of God, which took a highly unusual form in Byzantine Athens that has not yet been studied or even recognized. There were moments when middle Byzantine Athens eclipsed even Constantinople as the special city of the Theotokos. But this dimension of the story I also leave to experts in other fields than mine. The framework that I use for my analysis here is largely that of the reception of the classical tradition, namely how Byzantine Christians adapted the mixed legacy that they inherited from the ancient world. The emphasis is not on "continuity" but on the creative aspects and historical dimension of the cultural tension between Hellenism and Christianity. It calls for close readings of the texts that mention and so interpret the Parthenon for medieval audiences, for philological art-history. Secondary themes brought into the discussion are the questions of medieval pilgrimage and civic identity.

I had never planned to write this book, but while reading through the original sources for a broader project, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, I kept coming across references to Athens and the Parthenon. At first, I thought a brief article could bring attention to these texts and ask the basic questions of interpretation, but the evidence continued to pile up. And this was the Parthenon, after all, always on the horizon as I was growing up. It is not an insignificant topic in itself, and so I decided that its forgotten history deserved a longer study.

Some disclaimers are in order. This book focuses on the Parthenon and its veneration by Christians and does not offer a full history of Byzantine Athens, though digressions at key moments discuss the historical context

and give a sense of the life and topography of the city. Chronologically, the book covers the years from AD 400 to 1200. Partly for reasons of space I have not fully explored here Athens in late antiquity (second to sixth centuries), except to the degree that it provides a background for the conversion of the Parthenon into a church. The society, intellectual life, and religious and economic transformations of Athens in late antiquity are large and exciting topics that have not yet been fully addressed. The evidence (textual, archaeological, and prosopographical) is very rich, and so cannot be adequately covered here. Briefly, in that period the city boasted many prominent professors of philosophy and rhetoric, especially the anti-Christian Neoplatonists and some even more famous students, such as the future emperor Julian and the future Church Father Gregorios of Nazianzos. The city was sacked three times, by the Scandinavian Heruls (AD 267), by Alaric's Goths (AD 396), and by the Slavs (ca. 580). It remained a bastion of paganism and anti-Christian thought until quite late, indeed almost up to the very end. But it is the aim of the present study to argue that the closing of the schools by Justinian (ca. AD 529) and the catastrophes of the seventh century did not spell the "end" for Athens' classical civilization, as is not merely *usually* but rather *always* assumed.

Finally, a note on conventions. I have generally avoided the term "Virgin," which is not what the Theotokos and Theometor ("Mother of God") is normally called in Orthodox tradition. The term "Parthenos," which does mean Virgin, I have usually left untranslated because when used by Byzantine writers it was complicit in the negotiation between the classical past and Christian present of the temple on the Akropolis. Byzantine names are not Latinized or Anglicized but spelled correctly, except where they would not be easily recognized.

A note on the jacket image

A 'classic' photograph of the Parthenon would not be appropriate for a book such as this, and has been used too often on book covers anyway. The early modern sketches and paintings by western travelers depict a post-Byzantine phase of the city's history and would be misleading. I have opted for a work of Theophilos Hatzimichael (1870–1934), a folk painter from my native island of Lesbos who adorned the walls of many homes and shops with scenes from Greek history and daily life. His interest in the classical past, along with his figures in the Byzantine iconic

tradition, make his painting of "Perikles on the Pnyx justifying the Akropolis expenses" (1928) the closest we have to a view of how the Byzantines themselves might have imagined ancient Athens, as some of them tried to do (see pp. 156–157 below). For permission to use this image I thank the Municipality of Mytilene, Lesbos, and its mayor Nasos Giakalis.

Acknowledgments

This book owes a great debt to the work of many philologists and archaeologists, who continue to bring texts and artifacts to light, often without knowing what future projects they are enabling, and often too without thanks. Assembling the scattered pieces of this puzzle confirmed for me the importance of publishing recovered knowledge, no matter how small each piece may seem by itself.

I have also incurred specific debts. Audiences at the Department of Greek and Latin of the Ohio State University; the Modern Greek Program and Department of Classics of the University of Michigan; the Department of History of the University of California, San Diego; the Workshop on Late Antiquity and Byzantium at the University of Chicago; and the Byzantine Studies Conference (2006) asked penetrating questions and provided additional data. I am grateful for those invitations. Amy Papalexandrou, Bill Caraher, and Tasos Tanoulas read earlier versions of the book and made valuable comments, sharing their time and expertise. So did the two readers appointed by the Press, one of them Liz James, whose comments corrected particular flaws and improved the organization and presentation. The tough love of Polymnia Athanassiadi saved me from a weak introduction, for which, in retrospect, I am especially grateful. The book has also benefited from discussions with Giorgos Anagnostou, Stephanos Efthymiades, Nasia Giakovaki, Tim Gregory, Vassilios Lampropoulos, Artemis Leontis, Carolina López Ruiz, Titos Papamastorakis, and Lina Saradi, who generously shared their own publications and thoughts. I thank Anne-Marie Helvetius for Ghislain; Rob Nelson for light in Byzantine churches; and Nicolette Trahoulia for helping me rule out the Alexander romance. Wendy Watkins efficiently provided material from the Center for Epigraphical and Palaeographical Studies, and the College of Humanities made possible a research trip to Greece at a key moment.

This project required that I look beyond my usual textual preoccupations. Among its greatest pleasures were the discussions and experiences I have had with the architects and conservators working on the Parthenon and Propylaia, who were unfailingly supportive (despite my Byzantine

heresies) and who freely gave information, books, and the opportunity to examine the monuments on a day I will not forget. Some of the photographs capture what I saw. The Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA) is a model agency, the most courteous, scholarly, and professional I have dealt with, whose attention to detail is exactly what is needed to ensure the future of the temples. I thank especially Fani Mallouchou-Tufano, Tasos Tanoulas, and Manolis Korres, to whom we owe what we know about the monuments' ancient, Byzantine, and modern history. They deserve some of the credit for this book's contributions as well (though none of the blame for its errors).

Most of the photographs in the book were taken by me. Manolis Korres graciously allowed me to reproduce his drawings of the ancient and Byzantine Parthenon. Thanks are due to Angelos Matthaiou, Georgios Papadopoulos, and the Greek Epigraphical Society for permission to use Fig. 12, which they also graciously supplied to me; to Albert Failler for permission to reproduce Figs. 19 and 20 from the *Revue des Études Byzantines* (1976); to Dr. Alam Payind, Director of the Middle East Studies Center of the Ohio State University, for his spectacular photograph of Soumela (Fig. 23); to the Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments (ESMA) for making Fig. 27 available to me from the archives of the Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA), and to Fani Mallouchou-Tufano for obtaining that permission on my behalf; to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations, for permission to reproduce Fig. 21; and to the Photographic Archive of the Benaki Museum, Athens, for permission to reproduce Fig. 31. Julia D'Agostino of the College of Humanities' Digital Media Services Studio scanned many of the images; her expertise instantly solved my technical difficulties.

I especially thank Michael Sharp of Cambridge University Press for his early interest and support for this project as well as for his support of Byzantine Studies in general; thanks also to the entire team at the Press (Liz Noden, Rosina Di Marzo, and all whose names I don't know) for seeing the book through to completion with such efficiency and good cheer.

This book is dedicated with love to Kim Vogel, *heptakis.*

Introduction

Byzantine Athens: a city with no history?

The last history to be written of Byzantine and medieval Athens was Ferdinand Gregorovius' 1889 *Geschichte der Stadt Athen im Mittelalter.*[1] Gregorovius' analysis was not deep, nor was his familiarity with Byzantium. He devoted more space to the shorter period of western colonial rule (AD 1205–1456) than to the far longer Byzantine period. Lacking many of the sources that we have today, Gregorovius filled pages with background political narrative that intersected with Athenian history only at specific moments.

Many textual and archaeological sources of information about Byzantine Athens have since come to light, as the reader of this book will realize. Yet there has concurrently been a regression in the prospects for a new history to replace that of Gregorovius. Few of those sources have been utilized in a spate of recent surveys of Athens and the Parthenon, which offer detailed coverage of antiquity and then jump to the first western travelers and the modern nation-state while devoting only a few pages to Byzantium. In part this is because these sources are written in difficult Greek and have not been studied by professional Byzantinists, who have too much material to wade through in proportion to their numbers and whose focus has traditionally been on Constantinople. Still, had this material been collected, it would have been impossible for a scholar of ancient art to assert that "almost nothing is known of the history of the Parthenon during the 'Dark Ages,' which were nowhere darker than at Athens."[2] To the contrary, far more is known about the Parthenon in Byzantium than in antiquity, though "known" is an optimistic term here; rather, far more *can be known.* To alleviate this part of the problem, I have included in this book translations of most of the main sources for the Christian Parthenon.

[1] By 1904 it had been translated into Greek and revised by the Athenian paleographer and antiquarian Spyridon Lambros, who knew much about the topic.

[2] Bruno (1974a) 83.

But the regression is only partly due to the difficulty and dispersion of the sources. More serious is the deep-seated assumption that Athens ceased to have any importance after Justinian's closing of the schools (usually dated to 529), that both as a physical city and a set of ideals Athens lost its relevance in a Christian world ruled by Constantinople. Not only did it have no history, it *could not* have had one; its time had passed.

> According to the historical sources, no traveler (or almost none) visited Athens, which, at this time, was not a great city but a city without importance. Even when travelers arrived in cities that were rich in antiquities, they tended not to be very interested in them.[3]

The "historical sources," as we will see, say more or less exactly the opposite. Or consider the following, more lofty declaration:

> After the eclipse of antiquity, sealed by the closing of the philosophical schools by Justinian, Athens lay forgotten for centuries, enshrouded by a mantle of silence. For the medieval pilgrim it offered no sacred relics and held no promises of spiritual renewal or salvation ... Athens' political and cultural ascendancy in the eastern Mediterranean disappeared with the demise of classical civilization and passed on to other urban centers as new societies appeared in the area.[4]

Conventional though they are, these statements are false – not misleading or exaggerated but contrary to reality. As this book aims to prove, Athens was not forgotten, for it became one of the most important religious centers of the Byzantine world, attracting hundreds if not thousands of pilgrims including many from outside the empire. As a shrine of the Theotokos, there were moments when it eclipsed the prestige even of Constantinople. Moreover, it offered one of the most appealing promises of salvation that any medieval pilgrim could hope for and, in addition, this promise was predicated on the classical past to which the Parthenon was always indissolubly linked. There is strong evidence for a fairly widespread interest in classical antiquities, which seem to have been central to the civic identities of the towns of Byzantine Greece and which also seem to have generated something of a tourist industry. It was in Byzantium, not in antiquity, that we first find what we might for the sake of emphasis call worship *of* rather

[3] Ziolkowski (2005) 58, relying on Setton (1975b) III, the leading historian of medieval Athens after Gregorovius (though like him focusing on the Latin period). Studies of the image of Byzantine Athens present the same bleak picture: Lechner (1954) 92–94; Hunger (1990); di Branco (2005) 66. No history: Breitenbach (2003) 257. Note the title of Thompson (1959).

[4] Augustinos (1994) 93.

than only *in* the Parthenon (and even the latter has been denied by some to the classical Parthenon, which seems not to have captured the aesthetic, religious, or philosophical attention of antiquity). And it was the Byzantine Athenians who first praised the temple's "divine light," not anyone in antiquity and certainly not the western travelers who usually receive the credit for this trope. They too were echoing a long Byzantine tradition, albeit unknowingly.

Byzantine Athens has not been denied a history because of the "sources" but because, as can easily be seen in the above quotations, it happens to lie in the path of a particular view of history, a view that deals in large abstractions. Here Athens and the classics all lie on one side of a great divide with Christianity and all that is medieval or Byzantine on the other. The two sides may not overlap for they represent incommensurate world-views. This is a picture familiar from many textbooks and specialist studies. The centers of classical civilization were eclipsed by new religious and political configurations. Where Delphi, Athens, and Rome had once been the centers of the world, now the center was placed at Jerusalem or Constantinople. Classical antiquity is believed to have been buried for over a thousand years before it was rediscovered (or reinvented) by the Europeans, its true and natural heirs.[5] Athens was too closely linked to its classical past to play a leading role and so, with the passing of its era, no one has tried to imagine a contrary picture of its history, one in which the city "reinvents" itself to succeed in a changed world. The narrative of abstractions precludes creative engagement between pagan and Christian Athens. A hybrid such as the Byzantine Parthenon could have no history at this level because the thing was a contradiction in terms. The building's classical aspect was only a curiosity; at any rate, its conversion into a church – a philosophical incongruity – could take place only against a backdrop of Athenian decline and insignificance, which has accordingly been imagined and written into the history books before anyone bothered to look in the Byzantine sources.

Even the building's survival occasioned surprise. Pouqueville, a French traveler to Greece in the early nineteenth century, deplored the damage done to the monument by the Venetians and Elgin, but also asked: "How can one explain the Parthenon's preservation under the reign of Constantine and Theodosios – tyrants unworthy of the name 'great' [i.e., by extension, under all the Byzantine emperors] – who have destroyed more artistic masterpieces than the barbarians and the Turks?"[6] Here Byzantium represents

[5] For further reflection on this, see the Postscript.

[6] Pouqueville (1827) v. V, pt. 1, 77–78; tr. in Augustinos (1994) 321 n. 52.

the antithesis, indeed the physical cancellation of classical antiquity, just as much as did the "barbarians," e.g., the Persians, in sum all "Oriental," despotic, un-Hellenic peoples like the Byzantines who were demonized by the Enlightenment. But why, then, did the monuments of Athens survive? Pouqueville knew nothing from the sources about this, so his quandary was caused purely by his own preconceptions. We have to remember through all of this that the Byzantines had done far *less* damage to the monument than had Elgin and the Venetians!

The discontinuity thesis has taken serious scholarly form since then; it is, after all, a position many of whose aspects have ample support in the sources. In the twentieth century, Cyril Mango has stressed the break between antiquity and Byzantium in terms of both literature and artistic heritage. I have addressed the question of literature elsewhere (that is, whether Byzantine classicizing texts are "distorting mirrors" that merely mimic ancient models without reflecting any of their underlying merits, values, or ideas).[7] Regarding the antiquities of Greece in the Byzantine period, Mango articulated what has become the standard position for the past forty years. Most Byzantines, he argued, believed that ancient statues were inhabited by demons or possessed magical properties, and those who wrote about them were not interested in them as art but were only slavishly following ancient rhetorical conventions. In sum, "the Byzantines in general did not evince the slightest interest in what we understand by classical Greece."[8] This position has since echoed in the literature. "It is striking how little interest was shown by the inhabitants of the Byzantine empire ... in the relics of classical antiquity that were still to be found in the region where they lived," resulting in an "alienation of the Greeks from their own early cultural phases." After the rise of Christianity, "it was to be a thousand years before Christians turned their attention back to Italy and Greece as classical lands."[9]

The position that Mango attacked in his argument for discontinuity – that "Byzantium was a beacon of classical civilization shining in the barbarous gloom of the Middle Ages" – has been far too marginal in the scholarship to merit such attention. It is a straw man, crudely put so as

[7] See Kaldellis (2004) c. 1 on Mango (1975).

[8] Statues: Mango (1963); no interest in Greece: (1965) 32; again: (1994). Mango highlights the evidence for demonology (and magic) over that for other interests (imperial, aesthetic, pragmatic, mythological, civic, etc.). See also the Postscript.

[9] Respectively: van der Vin (1980) v. I, 310–311; Eisner (1991) 34. The opposite view, that the Byzantines (as opposed to the early Christians) loved and protected ancient art, is a function of Greek nationalism, e.g., Simopoulos (1993) 162 and c. 6 passim, but is not dominant even there.

to be easily refutable, and enables Mango to move to the opposite extreme. In a paper stressing discontinuity in the very title, he even draws attention to the fact that some Byzantines wore caftans and turbans and used prayer rugs. "I was not trying to prove that the Byzantines dressed and behaved like Arabs," he adds,[10] but the image sticks and raises the question of whether Byzantine Studies is an extension of the Classics or a species of Orientalism. It echoes Pouqueville's (less scholarly) equation of the Byzantines with barbarians and Turks.

The notions that the Byzantines were not interested in ancient Greece and that they did not look upon Greece in their own time as a classical land are, as we will see, false, certainly when it came to Athens. To the contrary, it was difficult for them to speak of Athens at all without engaging directly with the problem of its classical past and the relation of that past to Christianity; they were *overaware* of the classical past, not blind or indifferent to it. But this should not be taken as an argument for continuity. Byzantium was not the same as classical antiquity; it is rather that many sites of its culture, even its Christian aspect, were constituted in dialogic relation to it. My goal is not to replace one monolithic, closed view of Byzantium with another, but to move away from the need to have one view in the first place and to stimulate a critical discussion about why a particular view has prevailed – a view prejudicial to Byzantium in the Enlightenment context of modern historiography – when the evidence taken all together presents a mixed picture. So, for example, whereas it is easy to find Byzantine sources that reflect the belief that demons inhabited statues and pagan ruins, I have not found that belief attested for Athens in particular. The filling of Constantinople with ancient statuary, to cite another example, had to do with aesthetics and imperial ideology, as has belatedly been recognized.[11] Therefore, to explain the success of the Christian Parthenon requires us to rethink Byzantine views of the classical past and scrutinize our field's stake in the narratives of the Enlightenment (e.g., pagans vs. Christians, antiquity vs. the Middle Ages, reason vs. superstition, or freedom vs. theocracy and "oriental despotism"). If it is necessary to speak about history at this level of abstraction, we must recognize that all cultures are sites of conflict and disagreement and are riven by contradiction at the deepest level of their ideological foundations.

Modern writers were not the first to speak of "the end of Athens," and the polarities of Athens vs. Jerusalem or vs. Constantinople are not of modern make. With the modern narrative of Athenian decline in the background,

[10] Mango (1981) 51–52. Mango's papers were reprinted in (1984a). [11] Bassett (2004).

let us extend this section by looking at some of its ancient and Byzantine antecedents. The problem is in their interpretation and correct use, not merely in tracking them down and citing them as primary evidence, for they are not really evidence as such. It was Tertullianus (ca. 200) who first posed the famous rhetorical question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?," to which he implied the answer "absolutely nothing." The context of this claim was an argument that philosophy, man's effort to attain the truth by unaided reason, was ultimately responsible for many Christian heresies. St. Paul had warned against it, for

> he had been at Athens and had, in his discussions there, become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth. But in fact it only corrupts the truth, and is itself divided into its own manifold heresies by the variety of its mutually repugnant sects. What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? ... Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition.[12]

Tertullianus eventually joined a sect that was condemned as heretical, but that irony pales before the impossible position that Christian intellectuals were taking with such lofty pronouncements. He himself was steeped in dialectic and disputation (Jerome later fancied him a lawyer), and never entirely shook off the formative influence of Stoic philosophy, even in his theology. In fact, it was only his familiarity with "Athens" that enabled him to make the case for Christianity that he did, and the same was true for all later Christian theologians. It proved impossible to expound Christian doctrine based solely on Scripture. The practical question, then, was not *whether* to use Greek philosophy but *how*, though on the level of rhetoric and propaganda almost all Christian theorists maintained that their faith had entirely supplanted the wisdom of the ancients, which was foolishness in the eyes of God. Still, an influential minority of Christian sophists (such as Gregorios of Nazianzos) was more honest than Tertullianus about what they owed to Athens, both the city and the ideal for which it stood. Athens had *something* to do with Jerusalem after all, but it was difficult to say exactly *what*, a tension that ran through Christian "humanism" and would, as we will see, run through the history of the Christian Parthenon as well.[13]

[12] Tertullianus, *On the Interdiction of Heretics* 7 (tr. p. 246, slightly modified). For his argument, see Sider (1980) 417–419.

[13] For Gregorios and Athens, see McGuckin (2001) 16 n. 54, 53–83; for the problem of Christian Hellenism, Kaldellis (2007a) c. 3; for the image of Athens among the Fathers, Breitenbach (2003).

It was not easy for Athens to adapt to the Christian world. Named after its patron goddess, the city's reputation was ineluctably linked to the cults, myths, rituals, and art that many Christians had set out to abolish. The author of Acts notes, in connection with St. Paul's brief visit there, that the city was full of idols (17.16). Paul began his addess before the Athenians by saying that he considered them to be "most religious" (17.22), but *deisidaimonia* can also mean superstition or religious in a negative way (especially if *daimones* were false deities). This is not necessarily what Paul meant but it is how his words would have been taken by later Christian readers. This reputation was compounded by the city's failure to convert in late antiquity. The pagan cults persisted and the city's intellectual life included and was even dominated by outspoken pagan Platonists until the sixth century. It required imperial intervention by that most Christian monarch, Justinian, to shut down the schools in AD 529 or 531.[14] This pagan conservatism confirmed the suspicion held by many that the Athenian ideal itself was infected with the pagan aspects of Greek culture. Justinian's intervention has often been used as a symbolic date for the end of antiquity, especially in connection with the grand narrative.

Many Christians gloated over the end of Athens and the Athenian ideal. The liturgical poet of Justinian's Constantinople, Romanos Melodos, proclaimed the triumph of the "Galilaians" over the Athenians, alluding sarcastically to the polemical term used by the last pagan emperor, Julian (AD 361–363), who loved Athens, in his attack on Christianity. In another poem, Romanos sneered at the nonsense of the pagan philosophers.[15] The downfall of Athens, in other words, was literally celebrated from the pulpit of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. It was around this time (fifth to early seventh centuries) that the most famous hymn in Orthodoxy was composed. It is called the Akathistos because the congregation stands during it. In the Salutations of the Theotokos, it too gloats over the defeat of Athens:

Hail, vessel of God's wisdom,
Hail, repository of his providence,
Hail, you who reveal the philosophers as unwise,

[14] For Paul at Athens, see the end of Chapter 1. For Athens in late antiquity, see Thompson (1959); Frantz (1988); Castrén (1994); summary in Saradi (2006) 238–239; for religion, Trombley (2001) v. I, c. 4; and Fowden (1990); for the epigraphy of the period, Sironen (1997); for date and background of the closing of the schools, Watts (2005) and (2006).

[15] Romanos Melodos, *Kontakion* 31: *On the Mission of the Apostles* 16.2; cf. *Kontakion* 33: *On Pentecost* 17 (pp. 247 and 265); cf. Topping (1976) 12–13. In general, see Hunger (1984). For Julian against the Galilaians, see his treatise by that title (v. III, pp. 311–433).

Hail, you who refute the vain weavers of words,
Hail, for the bickerers are now feebleminded,
Hail, for the poets of myths have wasted away,
Hail, you who sliced through the Athenians' twisting.[16]

In short, some of the most authoritative voices of the new faith in the new capital of the empire made a point of proclaiming the refutation of mere human wisdom by Christ and his Mother and broadcast the defeat of "Athens." Even after the end of paganism, popular readings continued to circulate in which Athens was depicted as indelibly stained by its past. In the *Life of Markos the Athenian*, a later fictional romance set in late antiquity, the saint equates "Hellenism" with "the persecution of the Christians," and thanks God for "leading me to this holy place [i.e., "Ethiopia"], lest I die in my own country [i.e., Athens] and be buried in earth that had been polluted by so many sins."[17]

Pagan Athens was rhetorically and physically eliminated. The Parthenon and other temples were converted into churches, and a villa near the agora that may have belonged to the last head of the Academy was taken over in the mid sixth century for use by the city's bishop.[18] The shift to other centers was nicely reflected in the romance of Athenaïs, the daughter of a professor at Athens and a pagan. Around AD 420, she was selected as the bride of the emperor Theodosios II. Baptized as Eudokia, she settled in the court at Constantinople, but scandal later caused her to leave for Jerusalem and take up pious causes. The career of this empress who "quite literally preferred Jerusalem to Athens" was retold in many later Byzantine chronicles and tales.[19] The rejection of Athens could take the form of polemical epigrams as well, which were written as late as the tenth century by Ioannes Geometres. "The city of Erechtheus sprang from the earth" – alluding to the ancient Athenians' autochthony – "but New Rome came from the heavens." Another epigram is about the "wise men of Athens": You keep talking about the ancient wise men, it sneers, but all you really have left is Mt. Hymettos and its honey, the tombs of the dead and the ghosts of the wise. By contrast, *our* city – Constantinople – has both faith and the words of true wisdom.[20]

[16] *Akathistos Hymnos* 17. The latest discussions date it to the aftermath of the Council of Ephesos (431) or shortly afterwards: Peltomaa (2001) and 186–187 for a brief commentary on this strophe; Pentcheva (2006) 15–16.

[17] *Life of Markos the Athenian* 145, 161–163 (pp. 51–52).

[18] Athanassiadi (1999) 342–347.

[19] Cameron (1982) 279; also Holum (1982) c. 4; Burman (1994) 63–87; di Branco (2005) 88–95.

[20] Ioannes Geometres, *Poems* 109–110; cf. Hunger (1990) 51–52; Rhoby (2003) 76–77. For Geometres' life, see Lauxtermann (1998).

These texts can be (and have been) used to support the narrative of the end of Athens. After antiquity Athens could not compete directly with Rome or Jerusalem, for "the world of the future was Christian, while the greatness of Athens was unalterably pagan."[21] Its schools were shut down by Justinian, its art transported to Constantinople to adorn the Christian court and capital, and its ideals rejected by the authoritative spokesmen of the new religion. The city itself would have no real history, certainly no glory to match its classical past, at least not before the establishment of the modern Greek state in the nineteenth century.

That's the way history *should have* happened, according to one view – only it did not, as a multitide of Byzantine sources reveals. What then of Tertullianus, Romanos Melodos, the Akathistos hymn, and Geometres? What must be stressed about them at this point is that they are not really "sources" at all, certainly not for what was happening at Athens. They were rhetorically expressing their commitment to a particular set of ideological priorities. They were not making historical or factual statements in the first place, but constructing a narrative of "Athens" and "Jerusalem" (or "New Jerusalem") in which they had a personal stake. Tertullianus' position was too compromised for us to take it at face value. As for Romanos, the Akathistos, and Geometres, their gloating was premature. Athens would prove capable of usurping the position of Constantinople as the Theotokos' favored city, and in the language of the Akathistos itself no less! And an emperor of Geometres' own time would also pay homage to the Atheniotissa, undermining the poet's polarity of heaven and earth. We should not, then, as previous generations have done, rush to accept the view of Romanos, Geometres, and the like as exemplary of the Byzantine view and history of Athens.

The evidence presented in this book will reveal that these ideological pronouncements, which have been taken as canonical Byzantine views and even turned into history by many scholars, do not reflect the development of Athens as a Christian center in Byzantium. Not only was the city's history different from that implied by the rhetoric of these texts but the mainstream Byzantine view of Athens turns out to have been far more positive and nuanced. This book will fill in that history for both the Parthenon and Byzantine Athens more generally – a history that is widely supposed not to exist – and it will also reveal the creative engagement at Athens between the classical and the Christian elements that both flowed into the making of Byzantine civilization. The fundamental dynamics of the culture were

[21] Setton (1975b) III 180.

different in this respect than what has long been believed. In the process, we will also uncover considerable evidence for the nuanced ideological, archaeological, and even psychological modalities that underlay the reception of ancient ruins and monuments in Byzantium, specifically in Greece. These were not in their essence modern. They were only rewritten later to accord with modern narratives. The shape of many familiar "histories" may have to be redrawn.

1 | Conversions of the Parthenon

The Parthenon in antiquity: a reassessment

In the Introduction, I made a number of offhand claims comparing the Parthenon in antiquity and in Byzantium which may have startled the reader. Specifically, I said that we have more evidence for the Parthenon in Byzantium than we do for antiquity; that it is only in Byzantium that we find evidence for adoration of the building; and that it is in Byzantium that we first hear of the miracle of light that emanated from it. It is then that the Parthenon is first praised in terms of "light," a Byzantine (not ancient) rhetorical theme that was probably the ultimate source of the cliché employed by almost all modern travel writers. This comparison in favor of Byzantium can be extended in other directions as well. For example, it is only in Byzantium that we have evidence for people traveling to Athens for the purpose of worshiping at the Parthenon. In sum, to the best of our knowledge, the Parthenon was a more important monument in Byzantium than it ever had been in antiquity, though it must be granted that our knowledge is not perfect, especially regarding antiquity. Still, as historians we must respect the weight of the evidence and draw conclusions from it. This section will present what little evidence there is for the Parthenon in antiquity in order to situate its Byzantine history into a broader context.

The Parthenon itself is hardly mentioned in the literature of the classical and Hellenistic periods. Its origins were troubled by controversy. Perikles was blasted by his enemies in Athens for spending the money of the Delian league on such precious works, though obviously he carried the day in that debate.[1] His master-sculptor Pheidias was prosecuted and convicted of embezzlement.[2] The new Akropolis, and likely the Parthenon itelf, was used as a treasury for Athens' reserves, at least after the mid fifth century BC, which must have severely restricted access to it; this function seems to have continued during the fourth century, and armories are attested in

[1] Plutarch, *Perikles* 12.1–2. See R. Meiggs in Bruno (1974a) 101–111.

[2] Spivey (1996) c. 7; Hurwit (2004) 95–96, 122–124.

times of crisis.[3] After that, we hear little. In 304-303 BC, the west chamber of the temple was given to king Demetrios, the son of Antigonos, as his personal residence, and he filled it with courtesans, at least according to his enemies.[4]

What did the Parthenon mean in antiquity? Today it is hailed as a symbol of democracy, a triumph of classical architecture, and the sublimation of Greek religion through art. Yet little or no evidence can be produced that it was viewed in these ways in antiquity or even that it inspired particular admiration apart from the rest of Athens' many monuments – to say nothing of the extreme pitch of philosophical and national enthusiasm that has enveloped it in modern times. Iktinos, one of its architects, and a certain Karpion (who is otherwise unknown) co-authored a book on how it was built, which shows that at least one attempt was made to promote the temple's architectural virtues by those who knew them best. But nothing survives of this work except the bare mention of its existence in Vitruvius, in a catalogue of other such works.[5] There can be no doubt that it was admired by those who saw it but so were many other temples and buildings in Athens, Greece, and around the Mediterranean. There does not appear to have been anything special about the Parthenon, the building, in particular; the statue of the Parthenos inside generated much more interest (Fig. 1). Pausanias focuses on the chryselephantine (gold-and-ivory) statue of Athena and not on the architecture and the friezes; he barely mentions the building in fact. In this choice of emphasis he was not alone.[6] Given that the statue does not survive today, all our attention is focused on the architecture and the friezes.

Moreover, the temple's symbolic links to democratic ideology were loose and indirect. It was built when Athens was governed by a democracy, and some scholars have attempted to read democratic ideals into aspects of the Parthenon frieze iconography,[7] but these connections are tenuous and could probably have been made only by a few people in the late fifth

[3] Thucydides, *History* 2.13.3, 2.24.1. In 324 BC, Harpalos' hoard was stored on the Akropolis; see Green (1991) 461–462. For the ancient sources for the Akropolis, see Jahn and Michaelis (1976) 10–19, and for the treasury 55–56; Lapatin (2005) 279–287.

[4] Plutarch, *Demetrios* 23–24, 26. See Habicht (1997) 78.

[5] Vitruvius, *De architectura* 7 pref. 12.

[6] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.24.5-7. See Papachatzis (1992–1993) 25; Beard (2002) 23–31, who calls ancient writers "reticent" about the Parthenon, a slightly misleading term; for interest in the statue, see ibid. 40–41, and below; Lesk (2004) 281–282 n. 131. For the statue itself, see Lapatin (2005). It was widely copied in antiquity, its type known throughout the empire and beyond; e.g., Williams (1977).

[7] See Hurwit (2004) 231–232, for discussion.

1 Athena Parthenos, marble miniature copy of the Roman period (National Archaeological Museum, Athens).

and early fourth century BC. For the majority of Athenians and visitors, the temple would have reflected the glory of Athena and her city more generally from its legendary beginnings rather than any particular regime. The mythological events of the pediments and metopes as well as the

Panathenaic festival (if that is what the frieze depicts) all predated the democracy. Architecturally, the temple itself could just as well have been built by a tyrant like Polykrates of Samos, whose temple to Hera was equally if not more magnificent. In this respect, modern classicism and ancient practice are again misaligned. The Parthenon and Akropolis are often used today as emblems of the democracy, but the site of the Athenian democracy was in fact the Pnyx. It is less photogenic and mostly empty, but that was where the Assembly took place, and the Athenians of the classical age always associated the democracy with the Assembly, not the Akropolis.

Classicism and antiquity are misaligned more generally in this case too. Classical ideals today are universal, and the Parthenon has been invested with plenty of them. But in the age of Perikles, the remodeled Akropolis was largely a grandiose victory monument, celebrating the Athenians' defeat of the Persians and hegemony over the Greek world and, simultaneously, a cultic center that promoted their special relationship to Athena.[8] These ideals are too unsettling, historically limited, militaristic, or outdated for modern consumption. And the Parthenon in particular was only one element in the whole; there is no evidence that it was the most important. Religiously, among the monuments of Athens, it was not important. As far as we know, no one traveled to Athens specifically to pray or make a dedication there (as they would later in Byzantium). Religious travel in the ancient world was to oracles or for healing and initiation, and the Parthenon had none of these to offer. Pilgrimage to Athens was directed mostly to Eleusis.[9] The grand procession of the Panathenaic festival culminated on the Akropolis, but as far as we know the Parthenon was only a backdrop and not its destination. That destination was what today we call the Erechtheion, i.e., the temple of Athena Polias, which housed the goddess' most important cult statue.[10] It has even been argued that the Parthenon was not a temple at all, that it was a treasury built into a victory monument. This is a controversial thesis, and can be answered, but the fact that it can be plausibly put forth at all indicates how elusive our evidence is for the building's religious significance.[11]

The Parthenon likewise does not seem to have stood out among the many attractions of Athens; in fact, the Propylaia tend to come out ahead.

[8] See Hurwit (2004), esp. c. 9.

[9] For Athens identified with Eleusis in a Hellenistic inscription from Maroneia (Thrace) with an aretalogy of Isis, see Grandjean (1975) 18, 92, 95–98; cf. Fowden (1986) 47–48; for pilgrimage in antiquity, Dillon (1997); Rutherford (2001).

[10] Hurwit (2005) 15–16. For the Erechtheion, see Lesk (2004).

[11] Hurwit (1999) 27, 163–165; but see Korres (1996b) 98–100.

Thucydides mentions the "Propylaia and the other buildings" in estimating the expenses of the Periklean building program. Demosthenes lists among Athens' glories the Propylaia, the Parthenon, the stoas, and the ship-sheds at the Peiraieus; he and Aischines sometimes mentioned only the Propylaia and not the Parthenon at all as signs of the glory of Perikles' era. A certain Herakleides, who wrote a brief description of Greece in the third century BC, lists the Parthenon among Athens' attractions, as well as the theater, the unfinished Olympieion, and the Academy. He says that the Parthenon makes an impression on the visitor, but adds similar comments about other monuments too. An anonymous comic poet praised the dockyards, the Parthenon, the Peiraieus, the forests, and the sky of Athens.[12]

When Aemilius Paulus toured Greece in 167 BC after defeating Perseus of Makedonia, he visited Delphi, Lebadeia, the Euboian Euripos, Aulis and Oropos, Athens, Corinth and the Isthmos, Sikyon, Argos, Epidauros, Sparta, Pallantion, Megalopolis, and finally Olympia. Livius, our source, lists the attractions seen by the general at each place. At Athens, these included the Akropolis, the harbor, the Long Walls, the docks, the monuments of the generals, and the statues of gods and men. The Parthenon was never included among the seven wonders of the ancient world, a list first drawn up in the third century BC and subsequently modified often. In the second century AD, Plutarch names as the most honored places in Athens the shrine of Theseus, the Parthenon, and the initiation-hall at Eleusis.[13] On coins of the Roman period, when the city decided to depict the Akropolis it showcased the Propylaia and the Erechtheion, never the Parthenon (other coins depicted the images of Athena Polias, Promachos, Parthenos, and the Athena of the Parthenon pediments).[14] In short, the Parthenon was certainly admired but only as one among many other monuments and sights, and was in many cases overshadowed by them. When the Christian orator Aineias of Gaza (ca. AD 500) wrote a philosophical dialogue named the *Theophrastos* and set in antiquity, he captured this sense by listing among the city's many attractions the Akropolis, the Propylaia, and the shipyards.[15] It is quite possible that had these other monuments survived, the Parthenon would not enjoy such a monopoly of attention today; that monopoly, in

[12] Thucydides 2.13.3. Demosthenes, *Against Androtion* 76; cf. Hurwit (2004) 162–163. Herakleides, *On the Cities of Greece* fr. I.1; English tr. and discussion of the key passage in Habicht (1997) 170–172. Comic poet in Kock (1976) v. III, 471 (fr. 340). In the fourth century AD, Himerios mentioned the Propylaia and the Parthenon as Perikles' main achievements: *Or.* 31.11.

[13] Livius, *History* 45.27-28; see Casson (1994) 230–232. Plutarch, *On Exile* 17 (= *Moralia* 607a).

[14] E.g., Kroll (1993) 123, 145; some claim that it is the Parthenon, not the Erechtheion: cited in von Mosch (1999) 71–72.

[15] Aineias of Gaza, *Theophrastos* in *PG* LXXXV (1864) 876B.

turn, has meant that these ancient perceptions of monumentality have not been studied or explained (indeed even noticed for the most part). We speculate, for instance, that the Propylaia, harbor, shipyards, and initiation-hall were admired because they were unconventional and posed unique architectural challenges (for the Propylaia, which partially survive, one has to imagine the effect of the original roof and its elaborate decoration). The Parthenon, by contrast, was basically a temple, a large and impressive one to be sure, but of familar form and not peerless. Finally, as far as we can tell from the ancient evidence, it had a subdued or non-existent religious function, and did not stand for any ideal that would resonate with a modern audience.

It is not until the second century AD that we obtain relatively sustained discussions of the Akropolis monuments, and the timing was not accidental. This was a period of intense classicism in the broader Greek world, when the literary, historical, and artistic tastes of many Greek cities and writers looked back with nostalgia to the classical period that ended with Alexander. In part, this interest reflected the classicizing and Hellenizing tastes of the Roman imperial elite, but it has also been interpreted as an expression of cultural pride and reaction to Rome by Greek intellectuals, who were witnessing the rapid assimilation of their nation to a Roman identity.[16] It is no coincidence, then, that our most detailed account of Athens and the Akropolis was written now by Pausanias, who saw himself as a Greek patriot and tended to suppress most post-classical monuments, kings, and history to recreate a purified image of pre-Roman Greece.[17] This outlook colored his selection and presentation of material. For instance, he omits the 10-meter-tall circular temple to the goddess Roma erected under Augustus directly in front of the Parthenon's main (east) entrance.[18] Still, Pausanias was not interested in the Parthenon itself. His description focuses on the statues around the Akropolis and the histories behind them and, in particular, the gold-and-ivory statue of Athena inside, which was still taken as the work of Pheidias. Likewise, other antiquarian treatises on the Akropolis, which are lost but mentioned by later writers, focused on the dedications (statues and other), rather than on the temples.[19] Architecture was less

[16] Surveys in Bowie (1970); Swain (1996); for assimilation to Rome, Kaldellis (2007a) c. 2.

[17] Elsner (1995) c. 4, esp. 140–142; Swain (1996) c. 10; Habicht (1998) 104–105, 134.

[18] Korres (1996a) 140; Hurwit (2004) 247–248; Pedley (2005) 217–218.

[19] E.g., Polemon Periegetes (early second century BC) in Strabon, *Geography* 9.1.16 (396): four books on the dedications of the Akropolis; for the fragments of his work, see Müller ed., esp. 116–117; discussion in Rutherford (2001) 45–46; and Heliodoros of Athens (second century BC): fifteen books on the dedications (see the Bibliography). The second-century AD orator Ailios Aristeides, *Panathenaic Oration* 191, also refers collectively to the dedications and monuments

important to them than myths and stories, and there were usually more statues than people about on the Akropolis about which stories could be told.

Pausanias' account and the hints that we have concerning the literature devoted to the monuments of the Akropolis reveal that ancient travelers and viewers did not see on the Akropolis what we expect them to see. Their gaze was more cluttered than ours, for one thing. But there is also a basic misalignment at work here. Turning to our other main source, it is believed by many scholars that the importance of the Parthenon is established by Plutarch's account of Perikles' building program, an account which, in its own way, reflected the Hellenizing and classicizing trends of the early empire. His verdict is worth quoting:

> The works of Perikles are all the more to be admired in being made in so short a time to last for so long a time. For in beauty each was immediatedly made venerable, yet seems recent and fresh even today. Thus they always retain an aura of innovation, preserving their appearance intact through time.[20]

It has aptly been noted that Plutarch was groping here toward a concept akin to our notion of the "classical."[21] But we should not automatically conclude that he has the Parthenon chiefly in mind here, a modern projection. For instance, the standard commentary on the *Life of Perikles* asserts that here "Plutarch praises the incomparable beauty of the Parthenon buildings" – note the strange plural. And whereas we may think of the Parthenon as "the chief glory of Athens,"[22] no ancient source calls it that or even implies it. Plutarch did not pay special tribute to the Parthenon either. If we read his text without modern preconceptions about the Parthenon's incomparability, we see that Plutarch is really talking about all the projects that he believed were initiated by Perikles, including the initiation-hall at Eleusis, the Long Walls, the Odeion, the Propylaia, and others. It was the total impression that these monuments created that he admired, not any one of them in particular. In fact, he says less about the Parthenon individually than he does about some of the others, for instance the Propylaia.

on the Akropolis, and does not mention the Parthenon specifically; his interest is explicitly on Pheidias' statue in *Sacred Tales* 2.41. For tourist interest in the dedications, see Casson (1994) 236–237. Given what we see in Pausanias and other extant authors, I am not as optimistic as Beard (2002) 23 that the lost "gazetteers to the Athenian Akropolis … must have featured the temple prominently." The fourth-century orator Himerios would show visitors to Athens the olive tree and sea-water cistern on the Akropolis: *Or.* 59.3.

[20] Plutarch, *Perikles* 12–13, esp. 12.1, 13.3; for a critical reading, see Hurwit (2004) c. 3; for Plutarch between Greece and Rome, Swain (1996) c. 5.

[21] Settis (2006) 73. [22] Stadter (1989) 157–181; here 163 and 168.

To anticipate the evidence that will be presented later, we may conclude that the Parthenon as a church was more important than it had been as a temple. It was only in Byzantium that Athens was often identified with its cathedral; that people came from all around for the sole purpose of worshiping there; that the Parthenon eclipsed all other monumental sights in the city (of which there were still many); and that many described the building in superlative and miraculous language.

Granted, the comparison of temple and church is of dissimilar things. We cannot expect pagan temples to compete with Christian pilgrimage sites in these terms. But this is not a satisfying way out. Pilgrimage and tourism were hardly unknown in antiquity,[23] and if it required the transition to Christianity to bring the Parthenon to the fore then this is something that must be recognized and be written into history in a way in which it has not been so far. Besides, there was no necessity that the Christian Parthenon succeed; its prestige as a pilgrimage site was by no means guaranteed. Indeed, "Athens" had to struggle against considerable ideological hostility in the new Christian world. Its success, then, was a function of the dynamic relationship that developed between the old and the new at the heart of Greece's former glory. Everything seemed set in favor of the pagan temple, yet it did not attain much prominence. The hybrid church, on the other hand, acquired far greater spiritual importance against all odds (those odds were so overwhelming that negative histories have already been written, in this case prematurely).

To conclude this section, the Byzantine (and indeed the modern) cult of the Parthenon has no counterpart in antiquity. A book similar to the present one could not be written about the ancient phase of the temple's existence, which is why most books on the classical Parthenon focus on its art and architecture: very little is said about it by ancient writers and so accounts of its "meaning" cannot easily be written today. It might be objected that this is essentially an argument from silence and should not be pushed too far. This is true, but only to an extent. The argument is not so much *from* silence as *about* it. I have cited many ancient sources that could have mentioned the Parthenon's superlative importance, but do not. It is disingenuous to suppose that all the ancient sources that praised the Parthenon in a way that would satisfy modern tastes have been lost,[24] when we have so many that do mention it but give no sign of presenting it as without peer among the monuments of Athens. If we follow the evidence, the Propylaia seem to

[23] Dillon (1997); Rutherford (2001). [24] Cf. Beard (2002) 23.

have made the greater impression. What we need is a critical study of how the importance of the Parthenon today has interfered with how scholars discuss its importance in antiquity. And while I have no doubt that the temple was admired more than these sources let on, I also have no doubt that they would have given some hint if its importance in antiquity was in any way comparable to that which it acquired in Byzantium. The modern Parthenon was in a sense a monument of Byzantine manufacture.

The pagan Parthenon in late antiquity

The Hellenic nostalgia of antiquarians such as Plutarch and Pausanias fizzled out without issue in the following two centuries, and the religious context of viewing the Parthenon was about to change dramatically. In late antiquity, "Hellenism" was defined not in opposition to the Romans (or barbarians) but to Christians. In the empire's Greek-speaking lands Christians began to refer to pagans collectively as Hellenes. One person who epitomizes the conflicts of that period was the emperor Julian, the nephew of Constantine. Raised as a Christian after his family was slaughtered in the succession crisis of AD 337, he fell in love with the literature and philosophy of ancient Greece, especially with Homer and Plato, and tried to revive paganism during his brief reign (361–363). When he was marching against his cousin Constantius in 361, he sent manifestoes to the leading cities of Greece pleading his cause, though only the one to Athens survives. Julian recalls there that when he was a student in Athens in 355 and had been summoned by his cousin to take up power in Gaul as a Caesar, he began to cry: "I stretched my hands out to your Akropolis and implored Athena to save her suppliant and not to abandon me."[25]

Whatever Julian may have actually done when he received the news of his promotion – his letter is self-serving and self-consciously nostalgic – by 361 he was no longer trying to hide his pagan, "Hellenic" beliefs. Athena was still at the center of Athens' religious life, and Julian's reaction reminds us how visible the Akropolis was from every point in the city. The goddess stood for the city: just as Julian had appealed to her then, so he was now appealing to Athenians in his bid against Constantius, and through the Athenians to other Greek cities too. But we must note that his plea was

[25] Julian, *Letter to the Athenians* 375a–b (v. II, pp. 258–259); cf. Libanios, *Oration* 18 (*Funeral Oration for Julian*) 27–32, based on Julian's testimony (and including his prayer to the goddess). Julian in Athens: Athanassiadi (1992) 46–52. For his complex notion of Hellenism, see Kaldellis (2007a) 158–166.

addressed to Athena herself without mentioning her temple. Today when we think of the Parthenon we imagine the building itself, whereas in antiquity what came to mind must rather have been the image of the goddess inside, copies of which were on display in many places (and, in earlier times, on sale too). One of Julian's close associates, Nestorios, the last Eumolpid hierophant of Eleusis, is credited with having saved Athens from an earthquake in 375 by placing an image of the hero Achilles beneath the statue of Athena in the Parthenon and performing rites before it.[26] Pagan historians of the following century also spread the story that the Gothic general Alaric spared Athens in 396 because he saw a vision of Athena Promachos patrolling the walls of the city (this was the bronze Athena that stood outside the Parthenon on the Akropolis). Other sources and the archaeological evidence tend to contradict this tale of divine salvation, but it indicates once again that what was important for these last Hellenes was Athena herself, who was imagined in the guise of her statues, not her temple.[27]

Certainly, visitors would have wanted to see the famous temple. There is some evidence of travel for the sake of tourism in late antiquity, and even those who traveled for other reasons took in the sights. At the age of 22, in 336, Libanios of Antioch set out to complete his education in Athens. Sailing from Constantinople, he gazed from the ship "at the ill-fated city of Priam." During his stay in Athens, he traveled to Sparta to see the "whipping festival," which we know was a tourist attraction since at least the first century BC. Along the way he stopped at Corinth, as he did on another occasion when he went to Argos to be initiated in the local mysteries. He also went to Delphi.[28] Troy was always a favorite. The young Julian, possibly already flirting with paganism, came to the site "on the pretext that I wanted to explore the city, but in reality I wanted to visit the temples." He was surprised to find that the bishop of Ilion Pegasios maintained the shrines of the heroes with reverence. Later, when Julian became emperor, he appointed Pegasios the chief (pagan) priest of the region. The bishop's motives, of course, may have had less to do with belief than with the local economy.[29] As for Athens, the *Expositio totius mundi* (*Description of the entire world*), a text whose surviving Latin version dates to ca. 360,

[26] Zosimos, *New History* 4.18. For Julian and Nestorios, see Kaldellis (2005).

[27] Zosimos, *New History* 5.6. See Frantz (1988) 51–56.

[28] Libanios, *Autobiography* 15, 23, 35. For Sparta, see Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 209–211; for Delphi in late antiquity, Athanassiadi (1989–1990) 274–278.

[29] Julian, *Letter* 19 (v. III, pp. 48–55). For the tradition of tourism at the site, see Vermeule (1995) (essentially a catalogue); and Sage (2000). The place was not without ideological complications: Erskine (2001).

notes that Athens is worth visiting for its schools, history, and, above all, the Akropolis on which so many statues stand. The dedications were still more important than the temples.[30]

We know only a few of the men who visited Athens in late antiquity. In 372, the scholar-monk Jerome set out for Jerusalem, his books in tow. He must have passed through Athens on the way, for he later recounted that he was shown a great bronze sphere on the Akropolis that he was unable to move (it was there to test the strength of athletes, and he was no athlete). There is no reason to ask why he climbed the Akropolis, even though there was nothing Christian there at the time. Personified Philosophy in one of Lucian's dialogues reveals that it was customary to climb the Areopagos or the Akropolis, if only to gain a "panoramic" view of the city. And Christians were hardly immune to the fascination of a city with monuments. Even St. Paul, when he was speaking to the Athenians on the Areopagos, casually noted that he had been strolling through the city looking at their shrines. Historians would have had additional reasons to visit the city: Jerome justified his travelogue of the Holy Lands by arguing that those who want to better know Greek history should visit Athens (later he had reservations about the value of Christian pilgrimage). A generation after Jerome, Athens was visited by Synesios of Kyrene, a philosopher of ambiguous religious belief, who declared that it was a ruin with hardly anything worth seeing. It is possible that Synesios, representing Alexandrian Platonism, meant this polemical statement in a philosophical rather than an archaeological sense.[31]

A more direct witness to the place of the Parthenon in the life of the city and its importance for visitors is given in the *Life* of Ioannes Chrysostomos, the popular preacher and later patriarch of Constantinople (d. 407), written in the early seventh century by the patriarch of Alexandria Georgios. In what is almost certainly a fictional episode, Georgios has Ioannes travel to Athens to finish his studies, an event that would have taken place ca. 367. While in Athens, Ioannes engages in a debate with a certain prefect Demosthenes and a professor named Anthemios before the city council. Anthemios is a hard-line pagan and accuses Ioannes of showing disrespect to the city's patron goddess.

[30] *Expositio totius mundi* 52 (pp. 188–189, with *arcem* for *arcum*).

[31] Jerome: Kelly (1975) 36–37 and 120; for his conflicted view of pilgrimage, see Bitton-Ashkelony (2005). Lucian, *The Resurrected, or the Fisherman* 15. Paul in Acts of the Apostles 17.23 (see below). Synesios, *Letter* 135; tr. and discussed in Cameron and Long (1993) 409–411; Fowden (1990) 500.

> Every man who attends the school of this city pays greater respect to the gods by going up to the temple of the great goddess Athena and, falling before her, begs her to improve his reasoning so that he may better receive his lessons. And when they have attained this through her help, they turn back and thank her for many benefactions in their private affairs. But this here Ioannes alone ...[32]

The problem with this source is that it was written almost three centuries after the events it describes, and no other source attests Ioannes' visit to Athens. We cannot, then, be certain that the story is not an invention of the early seventh century, made plausible by the addition of authenticating touches such as the account of worship in the temple of Athena.[33] Certainly, Anthemios reflects the view held by many pagans in the fourth century that higher learning (Hellenic *paideia*) was inseparable from the worship of the gods, a view that Christian hard-liners endorsed (those, at least, who opposed Greek literature altogether). It is impossible that *all* students who traveled to Athens in the mid fourth century paid their respects to Athena, as we know that Christians in Athens like Gregorios of Nazianzos and Basileios of Kaisareia did not get into trouble of this kind. Still, it seems plausible that non-Christian students did go to honor the goddess upon their arrival in Athens, though here too the emphasis is on the divine figure and not her temple.[34]

As a tourist destination, Athens certainly faced much competition. The empire was large with many other things to see and Athens could not compete with Alexandria, Rome, or Antioch. Ammianus Marcellinus, the historian of the fourth century, recorded the awe that the sights of Rome instilled in the emperor Constantius II, who visited it for the first time in 357. The historian himself saw the remains of Assyrian cities and a panorama of the Mesopotamian plain.[35] In 489–490 the philosophers Damaskios and Isidoros traveled from Alexandria to Athens, exploring the history, religion, and intellectual life of places along the way in Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor.[36] Because of the fragmentary survival of Damaskios' account, we do not know what they found in Athens beyond the schools, but it is unlikely that the Parthenon could have impressed these men beyond measure. It is likely, moreover, that the Parthenon had been converted into a

[32] Georgios of Alexandria, *Life of Ioannes Chrysostomos* 4 (pp. 82–84); cf. Trombley (2001) v. I, 295–303, 333–341; di Branco (2005) 72 n. 37.

[33] For the ability of Byzantine writers to create plausible historical fictions, see Kaldellis (2008c).

[34] For the link between *paideia* and pagan worship, see Kaldellis (2007a) c. 3, esp. 151; for the schools of Athens in this period, Watts (2006).

[35] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gesta* 16.10. Assyria: Matthews (1989) 48–51.

[36] For their journey, see Dimitroukas (1997) v. I, 200–211; Athanassiadi (1999) 34–39.

church just a few years before Damaskios' arrival, as we will see below. In this case, the last head of the Academy in Athens before Justinian's closing of the schools would have arrived in Athens only a few years after the 900-year history of the pagan Parthenon had ended and its 1,000-year history as a church had begun. How are we to imagine that conversion? What was the balance between continuity and rupture in rededicating a temple such as that? Was it an act of Christian triumphalism or of Athenian continuity? Or did the custodians of the site cleverly play both sides of each issue, like Pegasios of Ilion and Synesios the philosopher-bishop of Kyrene?

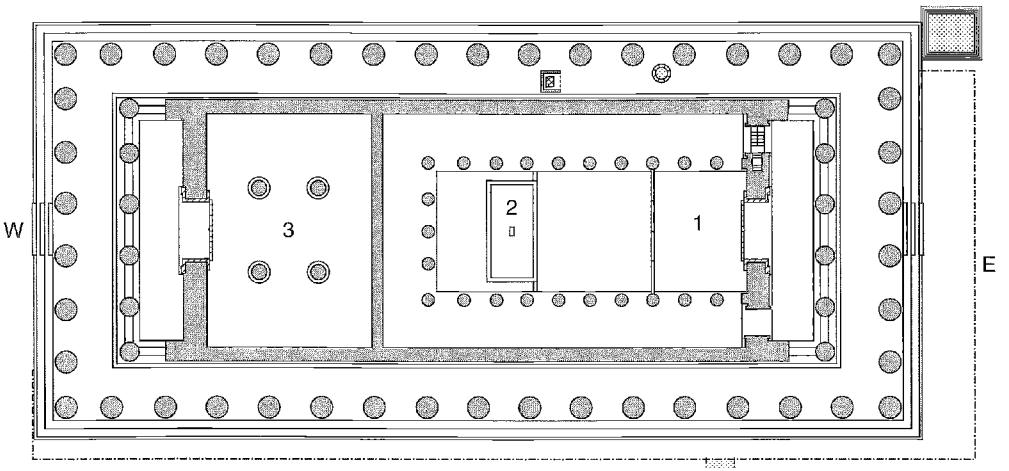
From temple to church

The most striking visual transformation that conversion to Christianity entailed for the cities of the eastern Mediterranean was the change in public architecture, the move from temples in the Greek style to churches in the Roman basilica style. Setting aside its many religious, ideological, and psychological consequences, on the architectural level there was "a shift from imposing exteriors and open-air monumental complexes to grand interiors, especially in the case of churches."[37] But when the Parthenon was converted into a church, these two aspects were combined. The "pagan" and the "Christian," as we will see throughout, were never to be fully separate in Byzantine Athens.

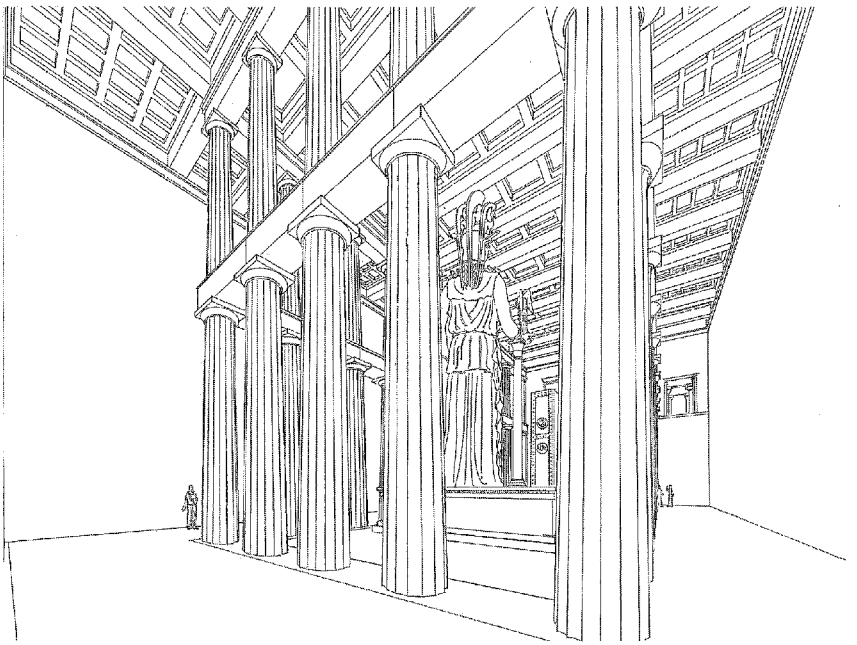
The architectural forms of Greek temples and early Christian churches were dissimilar as they served different religious purposes. Most important rituals at temples took place outside, before the altar, while the building itself housed the cult statue of the god. The Parthenon's main entrance was on the east, through huge doors (Fig. 2). The large (east) chamber housed the cult statue of Athena (Fig. 3). An interior two-tiered colonnade ran along both sides of the room and then behind the cult statue. This created definition for the interior space and drew attention to the statue. It was this space that became the nave of the church. The east chamber did not communicate with the smaller one to the west (which, for convenience, I will call the *opisthodomos*); this had to be entered from the west. This room seems to have served as a treasury, and was supported by four large and symetrically placed columns.[38]

[37] Elsner (2004) 284.

[38] There is a debate about the names of the chambers which we need not enter here: see Harris (1995) 1–8; *contra*: Hurwit (2004) 107–110, with whom I tend to agree.



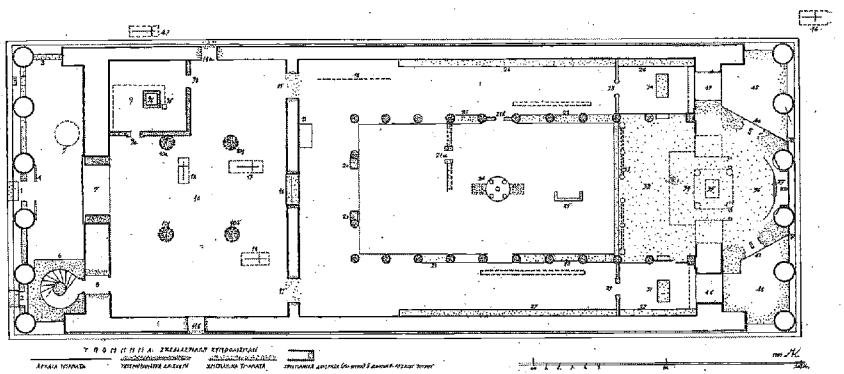
2 Plan of the classical Parthenon (by Manolis Korres), including recent findings such as the windows in the east wall, whose thickness also enclosed a staircase. Scale 1:400; key to plan: 1 Parthenon chamber; 2 statue of Athena Parthenos; 3 *opisthodomos* (the names of the rooms here and the numbers in the plan are by the author).



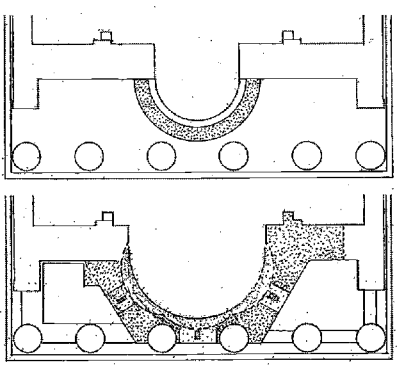
3 Parthenon chamber, view from the southwest corner (drawing by M. Korres). This space would become the church nave, with the congregation facing in the same direction as Athena. A second-floor gallery was probably also added in the flanking spaces between the walls and the colonnade.

The interior of early Christian churches, by contrast, was designed for the communal celebration of the liturgy. A basilica was essentially a long rectangular space divided lengthwise into three aisles by two interior colonnades. Light entered through rows of windows in the walls and the apse at the east end. One entered from the west and attention was directed to the east, which housed the sanctuary behind a low partition of decorated marble panels fitted into waist-high square columns. The sanctuary was defined on the outside by the apse, a semicircular or polygonal protrusion.

Creative interventions were therefore required to turn the Parthenon into a church (Fig. 4). The building had in any case been severely damaged and then restored at some point in late antiquity. Archaeologists have discovered that the interior of the temple, including the cult statue of Athena (or at least its wooden frame), the inner colonnade of the statue chamber, and the roof, were destroyed by fire and later repaired. Having read about this incident, I had never fully appreciated the extent of the damage before



10. Floor plan of the Parthenon as a Christian church. The most important parts are as follows: 1. Main entrance to the pronarthex. 2. Second main entrance (until the 13th century). 5. Marble receptacle. 6. Staircase (13th century). 7. Main entrance. 8. Second main entrance (until the 13th century). 9. Baptistery. 10. Narthex. 11. Side entrances. 12-14. Vaulted tombs under the floor of the narthex. 16, 15, 17. Central and side entrances to the main church. 18. Staircase to the gallery. 20. Piers of the arch. 21-23. Screens around the nave. 24. Later ambo. 26-27. Gallery support walls. 28-29. Side screens with short piers and rails. 30-31. Marble altars on four short columns. 32. Solea. 33. Hexastyle presbytery screen. 34. Ciborium. 35. High altar. 36. Synthronon. 37, 40, 41. Double apse windows. 38, 39. External corners of the apse. 42. Open water tank. 43. Vaulted tank. 44. Ancient window. 45. Modern window. 46-47. Vaulted tombs beneath the floor of the north pteroma. Drawing by M. Korres.



11. The apse of the Christian Parthenon. Above: from the 6th to the 12th centuries. Below: from the 12th to the 17th-19th centuries. Drawing by M. Korres.

4 Plan of the Christian Parthenon; first and second apse (drawings and key by M. Korres).

5 Interior of the Parthenon chamber after the late antique fire (drawing by M. Korres).

seeing the sketch by the architect Manolis Korres, a leading authority on the Parthenon's structural history (Fig. 5).

It is symptomatic of the gap between ancient and modern perceptions of the Parthenon that a scholar writing about this event has found it "paradoxical" that no text tells us when and how this damage occurred and who repaired it. His assumption was that the Parthenon was so important that any major event associated with it would be reported. But given how little the ancient sources tell us about it in general, this silence is not surprising. The destruction has plausibly but not certainly been associated with the attack by the Heruls, a Scandinavian people, in AD 267. They set fire to many buildings and left a layer of destruction that archaeologists have found

in various parts of the city. We also do not know when the Parthenon was repaired. The same scholar ascribed the initiative to the emperor Julian (361–363), who, as we have seen, loved Athens and restored many temples destroyed by Christian vandalism or enforced neglect. But this view is speculative, and requires that the Parthenon remained a burned-out shell for a century; moreover, Julian himself and other sources imply that the Parthenon was not a ruin in the years before his reign. The damage, then, may have been caused by Alaric and his Goths, who plundered and burned at least part of the lower city in AD 396 and may have even reached the Akropolis, despite the pagan narrative of Zosimos, who has Athena save the city.[39]

Traces of a new statue-base indicate that the cult image was restored. Even before the fire, the statue in the Parthenon was not that of Pheidias, or at least not entirely his, as the tyrant Lachares is said to have made away with the golden robe in 295 BC, probably melting it into coins.[40] It is unclear whether it was replaced with another one of gold. To repair the interior colonnade after the fire, ancient architects sacrificed one or two of the city's stoas to reuse their columns in the Parthenon. The new roof used clay rather than marble tiles, and covered only the cella, in other words not the space between it and the peristyle, which became, according to Korres, a more or less free-standing colonnade (see Fig. 6).[41]

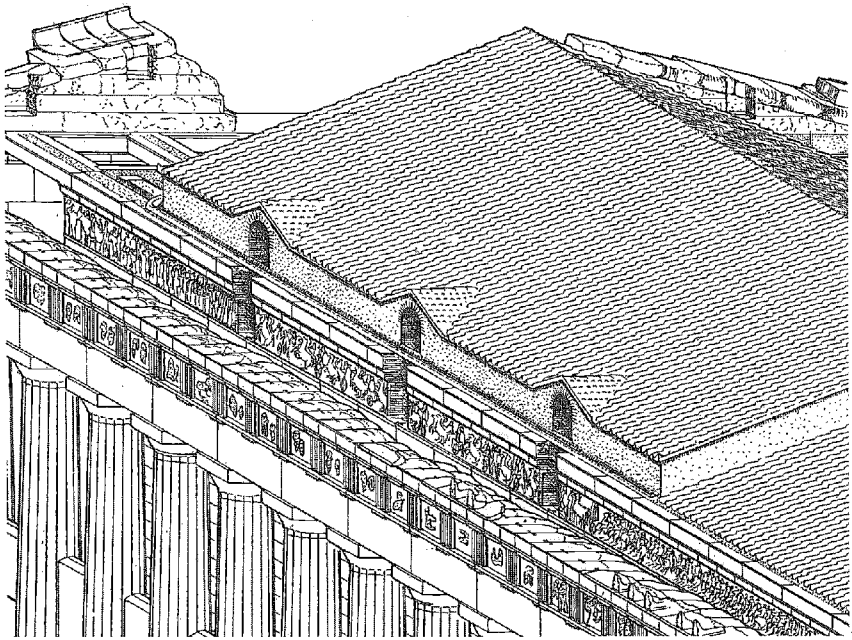
We do not know when, by whom, and why the Parthenon was converted into a church. I will address these questions below, especially the problem of how to understand such a takeover in its cultural and religious context, but I should first describe the architectural modifications that were involved. All who work on the Parthenon must at this point acknowledge a deep debt to the work of Manolis Korres, whose knowledge of the building is without equal.[42] Basically, the conversion entailed the reorientation of the building. One entered from the west, on a line from the Propylaia, while the former main entrance, in the east, was widened and then sealed off by an apse, the original version of which did not quite reach as far as the inner columns of the east porch. On the other side of the building, the spaces

[39] For the "paradox" of the sources' silence, Julian, and the Heruls, see Travlos (1973); Frantz (1979) is cautious.

[40] Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 71 (= *Moralia* 379d); Athenaios, *Deipnosophists* 9.405f; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.25.7, 1.29.16. See Habicht (1997) 81–87, esp. 86–87.

[41] Korres (1996a) 140–146.

[42] For the conversion of the Parthenon, see Korres (1996a) 146–148. Earlier accounts include Michaelis (1870–1871) 45–51; Soteriou (1927) 34–42; Deichmann (1938–1939); Norre (1966) c. 1; Setton (1975b) III 198–201; Pavan (1983) 37–38; Korres (1983) 138–139; and (1985). For how to convert a temple into a church, see Bayliss (2004) 35–49.



6 Roof of the Christian Parthenon (drawing by M. Korres). Note the windows punched through the frieze and the missing center of the east pediment; the roof does not extend to the external colonnade.

between the inner columns of the west porch – the six columns of the porch of the *opisthodomos* – were filled in by low walls, creating the church's *exonarthex*. Doors in these walls allowed access to the *exonarthex* from the outside. Low walls were also built in the spaces between the exterior columns, though whether this was done all around the building at once is not clear. This would have altered the building's external appearance somewhat, but it did not amount to a walling up of the entire exterior façade; the columns were entirely visible. Openings at intervals in these walls granted access to the (now unroofed) walkspace between the temple's colonnade and chamber walls.

The temple's west chamber – the former treasury, Demetrios' pleasure-house – became the church's narthex. A door was punched in the north wall and another in the south wall, creating two side entrances to the narthex from the exterior colonnade. Three doors were also punched through the wall separating the two inner chambers, joining the narthex to the nave. A baptistery was built in the northwest corner of the narthex, defined by screens. The font was in the center of the baptistery, positioned in a cutting

7 Parthenon apse frieze (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

made by removing part of the ancient floor. In the nave of the church – which resembled a three-aisled basilica, because of the inner colonnade – an upper-floor gallery was created by laying a wooden floor between the walls and the two-tier colonnade that used to enclose the statue of Athena (see Fig. 3). The beams supporting this gallery rested on retaining walls laid down along the main walls of the temple rather than being inserted into peg-holes drilled into the ancient walls (the latter was the usual method for adding interior floors, e.g., in the Propylaia). The only open space in the nave was, then, the main section of the eastern chamber inside the interior colonnade, only now it was orientated toward the east and there was no statue: the congregation stood on the very spot once occupied by Athena, and faced in the same direction as she once had. To admit more light, three windows were punched through the walls and the frieze on both sides (north and south) of the upper gallery (Fig. 6).

The evolution of the floorplan and layout of the nave and sanctuary is not as clear, in part because it involved smaller architectural elements than those I have already mentioned. Various sculpted marble elements have been found and dated to the first period of the Parthenon's conversion, for example some curved friezes that probably adorned the interior of the apse and date to the fifth or sixth century AD (Fig. 7).[43] The apse, whose floor was elevated, also contained the *synthronon*, a raised semicircular dais for the seats of the priests and the bishop's throne, the latter on axis and at the highest step of the *synthronon*. A number of thrones were found in the building by archaeologists in the nineteenth century, possibly taken from the theater of Dionysos on the southeastern slope of the Akropolis, but two of them had been placed there for a royal ceremony earlier in that century; only one was the bishop's throne, described by the early western travelers. The main altar in the sanctuary was capped by a *kiborion* (a canopy standing on four porphyry marble pillars). As in most basilicas of this period, the sanctuary was separated from the main floor of the nave by a low wall

[43] Sklavou-Mauroeidi (1999) 42 (no. 34).

8 Parthenon ambo (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens). This was one of the slightly curved sculpted panels that surrounded the homilist on his elevated pedestal.

of alternating short columns and sculpted marble panels. The remains were also found of a marble ambo, with curved panels bearing sculpted crosses (Fig. 8). This stood in the nave and its base was composed of elements taken from classical dedicatory monuments. It too has been dated tentatively to the fifth or sixth century.[44]

We have no evidence regarding the interior decoration of the church in the early period, especially that using materials other than marble. We have slightly better evidence from the twelfth century, and so I will discuss it later, in that context. We can now turn to examine the historical moment at which the Parthenon was converted, for that moment shaped the future

[44] Sklavou-Mauroeidi (1999) 63 (no. 74); cf. Korres (1987) 38–39. For the date of ca. 500, see Jakobs (1987) 238–239, with plate 5c and fig. 25. For the thrones, see Norre (1966) 22–23.

of the monument and of the city of Athens in the Byzantine world and beyond. This type of direct conversion was rare and in some other respects unique in the Roman world, and this peculiarity contributed to the emergence of the site as one of the chief religious and even archaeological attractions of the middle Byzantine period. Athens did not follow "the rules" for making the transition to Christianity, and this contributed to its astonishing success story in Byzantium: the most notoriously pagan city of antiquity became one of the most Christian, though without ever fully turning its back on its pagan past.

Triumph or continuity?

By the seventh century, and almost certainly long before, the Parthenon had been joined by other temples in Athens that had made the transition to Christianity. The entire monumental center around the Akropolis was Christianized. The Erechtheion was converted into a church by means of similar internal modifications, as were the south wing of the Propylaia, the Hephaisteion (dedicated to St. Georgios), and a small temple of Demetra and Kore by the Ilissos river (demolished in 1778). A large basilica, subsequently rebuilt many times, was erected directly on top of the site of the Asklepieion at the south base of the Akropolis. The pagan sanctuary was first destroyed, against the wishes of those like the Platonist philosopher Proklos who still worshiped there, and the new church was possibly dedicated to St. Andreas (inferred from an inscription found on the site). Directly to the east, a single-aisled basilica was built on the eastern *parodos* of the theater of Dionysos, with a nearby Christian cemetery. In the early fifth century, the courtyard of the library of Hadrian (north of the Akropolis) was taken up by a large and elaborate tetraconch church (later called the Megale Panagia), which may have functioned as the cathedral before the conversion of the Parthenon (Fig. 9). The Tower of the Winds in the Roman agora (the Water-Clock of Andronikos) was possibly converted into a majestic baptistery to serve that first cathedral (Fig. 10). The caves around the Akropolis, once sacred to various pagan deities, were reconsecrated for Christian worship in the following centuries.[45] And original

[45] For an overview, see Soteriou (1927) 43–50; and Travlos (1962) 722–732 = idem (1966) 356–378. For the Erechtheion, see Stevens *et al.* (1927) 492–523; Lesk (2004) c. 5; for a summary, Setton (1975b) III 201–202; for the Propylaia, Tanoulas (1997) 271–272; for the Hephaisteion, Dinsmoor (1941) 11–15, citing previous literature; for the Asklepieion, Gregory (1986) 237–239; for the tetraconch church, Fowden (1990) 499 citing previous discussions; for the Tower of

9 Tetraconch church in the courtyard of Hadrian's library, possibly Athens' cathedral before the Parthenon's conversion (Roman agora, Athens).

Christian basilicas were built elsewhere in the city that owed nothing to pagan predecessors.[46]

Unfortunately, we lack the equivalent of Plutarch's *Life of Perikles* to tell us when all this happened and on whose initiative. The fact that it happened at all is often known only through archaeology or the accounts of early modern travelers. Opinions as to when most of these conversions occurred range from the late fifth century to the early seventh. We have more indications regarding the Parthenon specifically, but they are not conclusive. For instance, I noted above that some of the marble elements of the new cathedral have been dated to the fifth or sixth century, but these are approximate dates. Besides, the elements may have been reused from earlier churches. None of the Christian inscriptions and graffiti of the Parthenon, which I will discuss in the following chapter, can be dated

the Winds and theater of Dionysos, Pallas (1989) 875–876 and 879–880 respectively; for the caves, Moschonas (1996) 142; but see Lalonde (2005).

[46] Frantz (1988) 72–74.

10 Tower of the Winds, possibly converted into a baptistery to serve the tetraconch church nearby (Roman agora, Athens). A pagan Akropolis would have loomed over this complex before the Parthenon's conversion.

with certainty before ca. 600, though it is possible that many of them are from the sixth century.

Hints are provided in the *Life of Proklos* written by Marinos. Proklos was the leading Neoplatonist in Athens in the fifth century (he lived from 410 to 485); Marinos was his student, successor, and biographer. He tells an interesting story about Proklos' arrival in Athens from Alexandria, sometime before 432. The first thing that Proklos wanted to do was "go up to the peak," i.e., to the Akropolis, but

> he was met at the entrance by the doorman, who was already about to insert the keys – so close was he to doing this that he said to him (I shall repeat the fellow's very words), 'Honestly, if you had not come, I was about to close up.' What omen, now, could have been more clear than this?[47]

[47] Marinos, *Life of Proklos, Or on Happiness* 10. For temple guards and locks, see Malkin (1998) 113. Some take it that Proklos was met at the *city's* entrance by the doorman, but this is clearly not the sense of the text (especially of the καί): ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐπορεύετο. ἀναβάντι δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ

This does not mean what some scholars have taken it to mean, namely that Proklos "found the Akropolis closed to him." Rather, it means that the pagan priesthood was in full control of the site, and the doorman let him in as he arrived in the nick of time. The omen consisted of the symbolic significance of the event: the doorman was about to lock down the pagan center of the city when Proklos arrived, just in time.

In his biography, Marinos recounts his master's extraordinary acts of pagan devotion in the face of harassment by the city's Christians (who are referred to in the text obliquely through snide allusions). Proklos' house, Marinos says, was situated to the south of the Akropolis, near the Asklepieion and the theater of Dionysos (and is perhaps to be identified with a mansion excavated in this very area).[48] The house could easily be seen from the Akropolis, which still belonged to Athena. And toward the end of Proklos' life the goddess communicated with him at a critical moment:

> How dear he himself was to the philosopher-goddess is sufficiently established by his choice of the philosophical life, which was such as my account reveals; but the goddess herself also indicated it plainly when her statue, which at that time was situated in the Parthenon, was displaced by those who move even the immovable. For it seemed to the philosopher in a dream that he was approached by a woman of fair aspect, who announced that he must prepare his house as quickly as possible. "For the mistress of Athens," she said, "desires to live with you."[49]

The story is allusive rather than informative, and was addressed to those who already knew what had happened and so did not need to be told the details. But it indicates clearly that when Marinos was writing this, about a year after Proklos' death (485), the cult statue of Athena had already been removed from the Parthenon. (Next to the passage where he refers to "those who move even the immovable" a Byzantine scribe later added: "I think he is hinting at us Christians here.") We do not know what was done with the cult statue of the Parthenon; the goddess' worship in Proklos' house probably centered on a replica (see Fig. 1). But just because the statue was removed does not mean that the temple was immediately converted into a church. We can imagine a period during which it was simply closed, probably only brief, though we do not know exactly when all this happened; certainly after Proklos' return from Lydia in 450. One historian has argued for 481–484, linking the event to the emperor Zenon's initiative against the temples

εἰς τὴν ἄκραν περιτυγχάνει ὁ θυρωρὸς πρὸς τῇ εἰσόδῳ – and, besides, what would the omen be then?

[48] Karivieri (1994).

[49] Marinos, *Life of Proklos, Or on Happiness* 30. For the dream, see Stewart (2004) 340–342; for Proklos' philosophy, Siorvanes (1996); for the fifth-century schools, Watts (2006) c. 4.

after a rebellion against him had failed.[50] Graves in the building with coins dating from the reign of Justinian (527–565) indicate that the conversion had occured by the mid sixth century.[51]

It is difficult to interpret the conversion, given that we know little about its circumstances. Nor can we rely on comparative evidence. We know less about other temples converted directly into churches than we do about the Parthenon, and the circumstances at Athens were unique anyway. Besides, even if we had texts explaining both the reasons and the method, we still ought not take them at face value. Christian authors (most notoriously Eusebios) tended to interpret any action taken by bishops and emperors with regard to pagan statues and temples as instances of "Christian triumph over paganism," though the motives of those involved may have been different or more nuanced, for instance they may have been imperial, aesthetic, or pragmatic.[52] Given our lack of reliable sources for this event and the fact that we cannot fill that gap with what we know about parallel cases, modern interpretations of specific events have tended to just reflect the general view that prevails among scholars at any time regarding the conversion of the ancient world to Christianity. Did the conversion of a temple signify triumphal victory and historical rupture or a basic continuity of worship between paganism and Christianity?

The latter view was popular in some circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to this theory, Christian modes of worship were molded to fit their closest pagan counterparts at the local level, so it was only natural for Athena Parthenos to be replaced by the Parthenos Theotokos, or the chief goddess of the Athenian pantheon by the most important woman in the Christian assembly of holy figures. Out of such hypotheses, histories such as the following were imagined on the basis of little concrete evidence:

> It will, indeed, be found an almost invariable rule in Greece that where there is a church, for the position of which it is otherwise hard to account, it is found to be placed upon the site of a temple ... Sometimes the attribute venerated in the heathen deity is venerated in the object of Christian reverence which also possesses it ... The

[50] Trombley (2001) v. I, 310–311, 342–344. The reference in the late fifth-century *Life of Thekla* 27 (pp. 278–279) to "those who honor Pallas Athena on their Akropolis like the Athenians" need not be contemporary. Athena was worshiped on the hill near Seleukeia that was subsequently occupied by the saint's shrine, which naturally suggested comparisons with Athens; see Johnson (2006) 126. Gregorios of Nazianzos, who spent time in both places, also seems to have connected Thekla's shrine with the Parthenon: Van Dam (2003) 53.

[51] Norre (1966) 34.

[52] For Eusebios' misrepresentation of Constantine's collection of statues in Constantinople, see Bassett (2004).

Twelve Gods are supplanted by the Twelve Apostles, and St. Nikolaos instead of Poseidon is invoked as mighty on the sea. The heroes of antiquity, such as Theseus, yield to the triumphant heroes of the Faith, such as Georgios. Sometimes none but a phonetic change is apparent, as where Elios is replaced by Elias, and Dionysos by Dionysios.[53]

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a reaction to this view. Facile comparisons were scrutinized carefully to eliminate mere similarity or coincidence. Continuity had to be proven by looking closely at the moment of transition and not assumed by glancing at the big picture or long term. Besides, continuity required that the early Christians understood what they were doing in those terms, otherwise historians risked placing modern anthropology into the minds of their subjects. And few temples were converted into churches, in some cases after long periods of abandonment. Even where continuity of place was maintained, a new and architecturally quite different church was erected on the ruins of its enemy, which had often been destroyed violently. What recycling of materials took place could be understood pragmatically, as it was cheaper to use building materials and architectural elements from the ruin. And beyond the few examples of temple conversions, Christians generally built their churches at a distance from pagan sanctuaries, altering the sacred topographies of both rural and urban spaces. Moreover, some historians believe that early Christians were terrified of demons, who were supposed to haunt ancient ruins. This made for a tortured relationship with the pagan past and supported a triumphalist reading of temple takeovers. For example, one dedicatory inscription from early sixth-century Syria boasted:

To God is now given the abode of demons;
salvific light now shines where darkness prevailed;
where once idol sacrifices now choirs of angels, and
where God was angered God now is appeased.

[53] Marquis of Bute (1885) 91–92; cf. from half a century earlier Wordsworth (2004 [1836]) 153: "The stream of paganism was thus taught to glide into a Christian channel with a soft and easy current ... there was generally some analogy, which regulated the transforming process, between the character transformed and that with which it was invested after the transformation." The magnum opus of this line of thinking was Lawson (1910). For more recent pages in the same tradition, see Moschonas (1996) 142 ("like-to-like" conversions in Athens); and Trombley (2001) v. I, c. 2, who is, however, synthetic rather than analytic. For a list of churches built on the sites of temples (most commonly) and temples made into churches (more rarely), and a discussion of the types of transition, see Deichmann (1939). Deichmann's list of "conversions" is now outdated, for example there are at least two and possibly three examples on Lesbos: Kaldellis (2002) 174–175; on updating the list, see Ward-Perkins (2003); Bayliss (2004), who offers a catalogue of ca. 250 cases. For a survey of the problem, see Caseau (2001) 103–107; Saradi (2006) 355–364.

This interpretation was buttressed by a general view of Byzantine culture that stressed discontinuity with the classical past.[54]

More recently, however, there has been a reaction against the extremes of this position too, and the field is witnessing now a cautious and partial revival of the older view. But that view can be rebuilt only on carefully documented specific cases, to avoid the simplistic and generalizing "anthropological" assumptions of the past. In a few cases in Greece, for example at Philippi and the Asklepieion in Athens, it seems that Christian sites quickly replaced pagan ones and possibly took over their social and religious functions as well. "Like to like" conversions are not to be ruled out, especially in cases like the Parthenon.[55] Detailed research in disparate fields has found an impressive degree of continuity from antiquity in specific sites of the culture which we might otherwise have expected Christianity to reform or abolish, for instance (and most famously) the ritual lament, which partially reflects non-Christian views about death. On the island of Lesbos, bull sacrifices followed by horse races continue today in more or less unchanged form (uninfluenced by tourism), showing that even the most defining form of pagan practice could be reconsecrated to Christian service. At the same time, it is being recognized that Christians and pagans inhabited the same world and shared many cultural institutions. There may have been broad similarities in how they conceptualized those areas of life that did not become sites of religious polemic, and converts brought much of their former religious experience and mentalities into the Church. All this is not to reestablish Continuity as a paradigm for the study of Christianization, but it does indicate that Discontinuity was not total.[56]

[54] For this shift of opinion, see the survey in Gregory (1986) 232–233; for skepticism directed against a specific instance of alleged continuity in Athens, see Lalonde (2005). C. Mango has championed the view that the Byzantines were afraid of demons, a part of his general project to stress discontinuity by highlighting the most superstitious aspects of the culture: (1963) and, in general, the papers in (1984a). For the view that avoidance of pagan sites was more common than appropriation and that appropriation took place long after abandonment, see Speiser (1976). The dedicatory epigram is quoted in Deichmann (1939) 105; and Trombley (2001) v. I, 104; v. II, 363; for a contemporary Syriac sermon that uses the same rhetoric, see Trombley and Watt (2000) xl. For a study of the architectural rhetoric of such triumphs, see Moralee (2006), arguing in some cases for an immediate transition (205).

[55] Hanson (1978) 266–267; Gregory (1986) 237–239; Bakirtzis (1998) 42–45; Stewart (2004) 347–348.

[56] Lament: Alexiou (2002). Sacrifices: Kaldellis (2002) 179–180 and (2008b), citing previous studies. For the "dangers of confusion" (in late Roman times, not ours), see Borgeaud (2004) 128–131. For studies arguing for a common cultural continuum, see Johnson (2006) 173; van Uytfanghe (1993).

There was of course considerable variation, adaptability, and pragmatism on the ground, especially when we look at specific regions and daily practices. But we cannot deny on theoretical grounds what must have seemed obvious to contemporaries. In many ways Christianity did pick up where local pagan cults left off. One painter got into trouble in the 460s for modeling an image of Christ on Pheidias' Olympian Zeus, which was on display in Constantinople at that very time. But how was he to know that he had crossed the line? In fact, who in those years knew where the boundaries lay? The relationship with the pagan past was being negotiated furiously within the new Christian order. No less an authority than pope Gregorius the Great (AD 601) advised Augustinus, his missionary in England, not to destroy the temples of the English but only the idols within them; he was to convert them to churches and not totally abolish their pagan rituals but rededicate them. Gregorius argued that by preserving such externalities, inner change could more smoothly be effected.[57] Something like this must have occurred on Lesbos with the bull sacrifices, in the northern regions of the island that we know were Christianized late.

Now, Proklos' Athens was obviously not the same as early Anglo-Saxon England. But this makes it all the more necessary to pay close attention to the distinctive features of each time, place, and monument. This has surprisingly not been done in the case of Athens and the Parthenon. In much of the scholarship, Continuity and Discontinuity fight it out elsewhere in the empire and the winner marches on Athens to impose terms. Nor should we assume that Triumphalism and Continuity were necessarily opposites. It is, after all, possible to imagine various degress of "triumphalist" practice. For instance, the local temple may be completely destroyed, dug up from the foundations and smashed up, with the ruins, now a quarry, abandoned to vegetation and the elements. The Christians in this scenario build their churches elsewhere and the topography of the city is changed. Alternatively, the temple is destroyed and abandoned, but a century or two later a church is built on top of its remains, perhaps because the memory has remained and reverence continues – and the materials lie readily at hand. Or, to consider a third scenario, a temple is destroyed and a church is built immediately on the site, perhaps replicating its specialist functions (e.g., healing) to serve the same clientele that has now converted. Or a temple is converted through drastic modification, in such a way that one would no longer recognize it

[57] Zeus and Christ: Mango (1986a) 40–41; Zeus on display: Bassett (2004) 98–102, 238 (no. 157). Gregorius the Great in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1.30.

(as happened to the temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Karia).[58] Finally, at the opposite end of the spectrum from the one with which I began, a temple is converted with relatively minor architectural modification, so that it is perfectly understood by everyone that this is the same temple, only rededicated. This is what happened to the Parthenon and other temples in the empire.[59]

All these options were exercised at various times and places in the empire, so obviously a single idea did not prevail among Christians about what it meant to triumph over paganism. What we have to explain are the local factors that influenced each decision. In one case, in early fifth-century Gaza, a debate is attested regarding what to do with the city's temple. Some wanted it destroyed while others advocated reconsecration. In the end, it was demolished and a new church built on the site, a form of compromise perhaps. But even then some objected who believed that the memory of the site had to be abolished.[60] So the range of options did not reflect merely regional diversity but also divided Christian communities.

Of the last type of transformation that I listed, namely direct conversion of a temple with minimal modification, Athens probably accounts for the plurality of cases for Greece and Asia Minor. Four or more temples and other buildings were converted into churches (and other auxiliary structures) with little modification. Whereas at Aphrodisias no one would think that the new church was just the old temple rededicated, looking at the Christian Parthenon, Erechtheion, Tower of the Winds, and Hephaisteion it was impossible to avoid that conclusion. The Parthenon never shed its pagan appearance and history, and Byzantine writers, we will see, viewed it as one monument that had a continuous history from antiquity marked by a moment of rupture, the switch from Athena to the Theotokos. The latter, however, was understood as the successor of Athena Parthenos as the city's divine patron figure, or *poliouchos*, and also exemplified an additional

[58] Aphrodisias: Cormack (1990); Ward-Perkins (1999) 234–235. For destruction of temples, see Fowden (1978) 53–78; Saradi (2008). By looking closely at the rhetoric of the texts, Caseau (2001) argues for less violence, while Sauer (2003) argues for more violence by looking closely at the archaeology.

[59] Cf. the temples to Artemis and Iphigeneia in Kappadokia "which the Christians have turned into temples for themselves, without changing their architecture in the least": Prokopios, *Wars* 1.17.18. For the range of "temple conversions" in the Peloponnese, see Avramea (1997) 114–115; a similar typology (direct vs. indirect temple conversions) is offered by Bayliss (2004) c. 3. There were also mixed cases: a temple on Naxos was first converted as it was, with minimal changes, while later it was mostly demolished and rebuilt. See Korres (2001).

[60] Markos the Deacon, *Life of Bishop Porphyrios of Gaza* 66 and 75 (pp. 52 and 60). For a discussion, see Trombley (2001) v. I, 215–222, who defends the text's historical value at 246–282.

quality, namely the virginity of her rival (who was now retrospectivly cast as a "false" virgin by some). And historians are again considering the notion that the adoration of the Theotokos in Byzantium continued many of the same themes as had that of Athena in antiquity, especially that of the Virgin patron of war.[61]

All this signifies that the identity of the Parthenon (and of Athens more broadly) was not lost in conversion but rather transformed and extended.

What happened at Athens?

"What are you really doing, erecting an ideal or knocking one down?" I may perhaps be asked. But have you ever asked yourselves sufficiently how much the erection of *every* ideal on earth has cost? How much reality has to be misunderstood and slandered, how many lies have had to be sanctified, how many consciences disturbed, how much "God" sacrificed every time? If a temple is to be erected *a temple must be destroyed*: that is the law – let anyone who can show me a case in which it is not fulfilled![62]

If the manner of the Parthenon's transition, namely a relatively smooth one of name, function, and history, was rare, that was perhaps because Athens itself was not a typical city. Its classical history and prestige were not forgotten in Byzantium. Athens also never lost its theophoric name. Athenians continued to be, literally, the "people of Athena." Aphrodisias, by contrast, was renamed Stauroupolis ("City of the Cross") by its ecclesiastical authorities, and Antioch was renamed Theoupolis ("City of God") in the sixth century (though the new name did not fully replace the old).

Athens was unusual not only for the high number of temples converted directly into churches. There is another curious sign. The Parthenon's pediment sculptures were for the most part left intact. These depicted the contest between Athena and Poseidon on the west end and the birth of Athena on the east, but the central statues of the east pediment had vanished by the time of our first (early modern) descriptions along with the central part of the pediment wall (see Fig. 24). The removal of this section of the east pediment was certainly unrelated to the damage sustained by the temple in the fire and was probably due to architectural rather than religious

[61] Limberis (1994) c. 6; Pentcheva (2006) 63–65.
[62] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 2.24 (p. 95).

11 "Annunciation" metope (on the Parthenon's north side, by the western corner).

considerations among the Christians.[63] The frieze running along the inside of the peristyle was also not molested for religious reasons, only where windows had to be opened. On the other hand, the metope sculptures of the east, north, and west sides were defaced (these depicted the battles of gods and giants, of Greeks and Trojans, and of Greeks and Amazons respectively), but there is no way to know when and why this happened. One metope was left intact on the west end of the north side, possibly because it seemed to depict the Annunciation (the angel and Maria), a likely instance of *interpretatio Christiana* (Fig. 11).[64]

[63] Manolis Korres, personal communication.

[64] Rodenwaldt (1933); for other possible instances of *interpretatio Christiana*, Mango (1963) 63–64; Simopoulos (1993) 236. For the metopes in general, see Schwab (2005).

We must be careful in evaluating this evidence. Many modern accounts, reflecting the bias which casts the Byzantines as hostile to the classical tradition, highlight the destruction of the metopes as an act that exemplifies the prevailing attitudes, and forget the survival of the pediments. In my view, the preservation of the pediments should count for more than the defacement of the metopes, as the latter may have been the action of but one moment (which we cannot date, and we cannot assume was contemporaneous with conversion), whereas the former required constant toleration, and perhaps more than that, throughout the entire Byzantine and medieval period. In any case, nothing has been *proven* in this matter. For all we know, it was the Latin lords of Athens, in the period 1205–1456, who defaced and destroyed the metopes (it is unlikely to have been the Turks, because of the "Annunciation" metope). Be that as it may, one historian has rightly noted that:

> These pediment-sculptures are a unique instance in the whole area of the empire of a pagan sculptural cycle surviving intact and *in situ* on the front of a temple into modern times – and this was on a temple converted into a church! An ancient Greek, transported forward in time, who visited the cathedral of medieval Athens, would have had no difficulty recognizing it as the Temple of Athena.[65]

Entering the church from the west, one looked up to the figures of Athena and Poseidon holding their contest before the city's legendary kings. And this is to say nothing about other temples and monuments that were neither converted nor destroyed, such as the one of Athena Nike by the Propylaia, which continued to stand unmolested in all their pagan splendor.

It is difficult to come to terms with a Byzantine church above whose main doors stood the exquisitely carved figures of Athena, Poseidon, and other figures from the city's pagan mythistory. How did Byzantine worshipers and pilgrims to the Christian Parthenon perceive them? Unfortunately, we do not have direct evidence for this aspect of their mentality. It is possible that the locals at least remembered the link between the event represented on the west pediment and the history of their city, making the sculptures' survival a matter of civic pride (we will consider this interpretation of Byzantine Athens more broadly below). On the other hand, we may also take a processional view of the arrangement, with worshipers moving through time as they passed by the pagan gods into the building's Christian interior,

[65] Ward-Perkins (1999) 236; see 235 n. 23 for the metopes and 236–237 n. 25 on the city's name; also Hurwit (2004) 12 for the classical period; for the pediments, Palagia (2005).

facing (in later centuries at least) images of the saints and an apse mosaic of the Theotokos, on a lofty position in the east of the church that rivaled that of the gods outside; the latter were now literally left behind and facing in the wrong direction with regard to the congregation inside. Perhaps, then, the statues of the west pediment may have been removed (if they were removed by the Byzantines) because their proximity to the apse Theotokos was too disturbing. Overall, there was a nice symbolism in having the gods outside the temple and Christian images inside, in the same way that Greek culture in general was explicitly held by the Byzantines to lie "outside" (*exothen*) or "outside the threshold" (*thyrathen*) of the Christian community. It was honored, certainly, but (theoretically) kept at a distance. The Parthenon would then be a fascinating monumental representation of broader Byzantine views of the past and cultural adjustment, an arrangement in marble and images that encoded the culture's complex view of the world (more complex than is usually granted).

Again, because of the scarcity and silence of the sources we will never know exactly how the conversion happened at Athens and how contemporaries perceived it; in any case, there must have been a spectrum of opinions there too. But if we attend, as has not yet been done by historians, to the specific features of the Athenian scene in late antiquity, we may be able to better explain the unique nature of what transpired, and how the Parthenon made the transition to the new Christian world and was preserved in this corner of Byzantium. First, we must consider the topography. In few cities of the empire was the citadel both so prominent and yet accessible. It is not possible to avoid the Akropolis in Athens, as it is visible from all sides and defines the city; it "is carved into Athens' urban plan."[66] Indeed, in classical antiquity the Akropolis was called simply "the city" (*polis*).[67] Michael Choniates, the new bishop of the city in 1182, put it well when he said that "from this Akropolis, as from the middle of a circle, rays of light shoot out equally in all directions and set ablaze the entire city."[68] Control of the Akropolis has always been necessary for any regime to maintain power and ideological supremacy over the city of Athens (even in the fantastic scenarios of Aristophanes). The dominant power – whether political or religious – has to make its presence felt there. One sees this better by living in Athens than from reading books about it. It is unlikely that the Akropolis was

[66] Leontis (1995) 27. [67] Hurwit (1999) 8 and 327 n. 8.

[68] Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 36 (v. I, p. 105). See p. 159 below. For a similar situation on a smaller scale (an ancient temple on a hill dominating the village, giving its name to it), see Sozomenos, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.15.

abandoned for long after the temple's closure; the pull of such a vacuum could not long have been resisted.[69]

When the Theotokos replaced Athena in the Parthenon, she took over the pagan goddess' place as the patron deity and protectress of the city, its *poliouchos*. The Parthenon, in other words, retained its function and symbolism as the home of the city's holy guardian. Thus the role that the monument played in the topography and civic ideology of Athens was preserved, among both Christians and pagans. One patron "saint" took over from another just as elsewhere healing gods were replaced by healing saints, as for example in the Asklepieion at the foot of the rock.

It is also possible that for the Athenians of late antiquity the Parthenon had historic and civic associations that transcended the difference between pagan and Christian. In other cities, especially those with different topographies, it was possible to raze the main temple and build a church in another place. But the Parthenon was not built on just any place, and, moreover, its demolition would have been costly and difficult, assuming that it was desirable in the first place. In the late fourth century, the bishop Markellos of Apameia in Syria found it almost impossible from an engineering point of view to pull down the temple of Zeus-Bel in his city.[70] The Athenians may have faced a different, more psychological, predicament. The thought of destroying the monumental center of their city may have been too disturbing to them; instead, they directly converted it entire, and what they could not convert, for example the small temple of Athena Nike, they probably left intact (sculptures and all). This is only a hypothesis; it cannot be *proven* any more than any other hypothesis for what happened at Athens can be proven, but it does fit better the evidence that we have, and the mode of civic conversion at Athens appears to have taken a different course than in most other cities. We saw that by Plutarch's time the city's monumental center could be regarded as "classical," as both old and ever new. According to this civic model, the Christians of Athens were also Athenians. Civic pride, well documented in this period, may have played a key role in the manner of conversion, which was as much a mode of preservation.[71]

[69] The trend has been to consider the site long abandoned before conversion: Speiser (1976) 309–320; Pavan (1983) 37; Pallas (1989) 882; Athanassiadi (1994) 35; and Ousterhout (2005) 301–302.

[70] Theodoretos, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.21. See Trombley (2001) v. I, 123–125; Bayliss (2004) 22–23; for the significance of the temple and Apameia, see Athanassiadi (2006) c. 1.

[71] Regarding Philippi too it has been argued that "the transition from one religion to the other took place on a civic level": Bakirtzis (1998) 45; cf. Saradi (2006) 55–58. For the "wish to maintain the monumental heart of the city," see also Ward-Perkins (2003) 289.

We may also consider aesthetic motives. There is evidence that Christians in late antiquity began to find aesthetic value in pagan art and architecture and in some cases preserved it for that reason. A law issued in 382 by Theodosius I decreed that a certain temple in the eastern province of Osrhoene, which was the center of an important festival and contained images, should be preserved due to "the value of art rather than divinity," so long as pagan worship was excluded. This law was included in the *Theodosian Code* (early fifth century), empowering local authorities throughout the empire to make such decisions. Laws by the sons of Theodosius prohibited the destruction of monuments and temples that were not used for illegal religious practices. So alongside (or against) the well-known attitudes of superstitious loathing and the destruction of classical statuary and monuments that have stigmatized this religious transition as especially violent, there is a growing body of evidence for Christian appreciation and appropriation of ancient art, in both private and public settings.[72] There is parallel evidence that learned pagans, for their part, were willing to view religious statues as art rather than as objects of devotion. In was in those terms that Libanios addressed the emperor Theodosius I regarding a statue of Asklepios.[73] And if Christians and pagans such as these were to find common ground it was mostly likely going to happen at Athens.

Let us consider who these Christian Athenians were likely to have been, for in this respect Athens was perhaps unlike most cities. For all their numbers and outspokenness, the pagan professors did not monopolize classical culture in the schools of Athens. From the fourth century, we know the teacher of rhetoric Prohairesios, who was a Christian of sorts but still taught mostly pagan students. Gregorios of Nazianzos' account of studying in Athens with his friend Basileios of Kaisareia implies a presence of Christian students. Gregorios was infatuated with Athens – "the golden," he called it – and championed the study of classical culture by Christians, even though he frankly detested the city's pervasive and open paganism.[74] It is quite likely that because of the schools the upper class of Athens in late antiquity included a large number of educated Christians. In the historical fiction written about the life of Ioannes Chrysostomos

[72] *Theodosian Code* 16.10.8, 16.10.15, 16.10.18. See Saradi-Mendelovici (1990); Lepelley (1994); Bassett (2004) esp. 111–120; Saradi (2006) 364. For the confusing picture given by the *Code*, see Caseau (2001) 70–72, and passim for a study of late antique and modern attitudes toward the "desacralization" of pagan temples and objects.

[73] Libanios, *Oration* 30 (*To the Emperor Theodosios, On Behalf of the Temples*) 22.

[74] Prohairesios: Banchich (1993); Goulet (2000); Watts (2006) c. 3; for Gregorios and Athens, McGuckin (2001) 16 n. 54, 53–83; Breitenbach (2003) c. 4; Kaldellis (2007a) 159–160.

by Georgios of Alexandria in the early seventh century – a text whose relevance for the religious life of Athens I discussed above – the "prefect" of the city named Demosthenes is subtly presented as a cryptopagan who had formally accepted Christianity only to be eligible for high office under Christian emperors. The professor Anthemios who converts at the end of the narrative is presented as a passionate worshiper of Athena and the manner of his conversion was unlikely to have inspired in him a desire to destroy her temple afterwards.[75] The same ambiguities are observed in more historical figures. Scholars are uncertain about the religious affiliation of Herkoulios, prefect of Illyricum in ca. 410, who rebuilt part of the lower city of Athens, was praised by prominent pagan professors, and was honored with a statue next to that of Athena Promachos whose epigram was couched in pagan terms. But Herkoulios may still have "conformed publicly to Christianity,"[76] like the semi-fictional prefect Demosthenes.

If such men had a say in the conversion of the Parthenon, it would go a long way toward explaining the subsequent history of the monument. The likes of Proklos on one side and Markellos on the other were excluded by a consensus among Christians and pagans who met on the ground of *paideia* and civic pride, aesthetics and – why not? – economics. Christian classicists like Gregorios of Nazianzos could find a common ground with bishops like Pegasios of Ilion and intellectuals like Synesios and the poet and historian Agathias, who were willing to adapt to the new faith in different ways.[77] Admittedly, we have to imagine their Athenian counterparts because we have no direct information about them. They were the kind of Christian like those in sixth- and early seventh-century Athens who used lamps with the image of Athena Promachos.[78] It was the conventional identification of Athens with its classical glory, which had served the city so well during the early empire, that now smoothed its transition into a new world. There is no evidence from Athens (or Greece, for that matter) for the monks and bishops who were tearing down temples and scaring away demons in other parts. In fact, no monasteries are attested in Athens until centuries later. Equally, there is no evidence from the history of Byzantine Athens that anyone believed that demons haunted the ancient ruins, a modern fixed idea that has been applied indiscriminately and well beyond its interpretive

[75] Georgios of Alexandria, *Life of Ioannes Chrysostomos* 4 (pp. 82–84); cf. Trombley (2001) v. I, 295–303, 333–341; di Branco (2005) 72 n. 37. See pp. 21–22 above. For an interpenetration of the civic council and the schools in late antique Athens, see Watts (2006).

[76] Frantz (1988) 63–64; Fowden (1990) 499; Sironen (1997) 81–84 (nos. 22–23).

[77] For Agathias, see Kaldellis (1999a).

[78] Thompson (1959) 72; Frantz (1988) ii; Karivieri (1996) 29–30.

scope.[79] The only possible acts of holy vandalism in late antique Athens that are attested through archaeology are the destruction of the Asklepieion, though this too has plausibly been interpreted as due to the temple's unsuitable architecture and not to pious hatred: it simply had to be replaced.[80] Beyond the city center, in Attica, we do find the smashing of some sculptures in two caves of Pan on Mts. Hymettos and Parnes and the violent destruction of the statue of Nemesis at the coastal deme of Rhamnous.[81]

The demands of Christian triumphalism were satisfied at Athens by the mere rededication of the Parthenon. It was not necessary to clear the site down to the bedrock in order to believe that Maria had prevailed over Athena. Whereas elsewhere the gods were condemned to oblivion and a new beginning was made, victory here did not abolish the memory of the vanquished and probably never aimed to do so. The pediments were a constant reminder, as was the very name of the city and of the temple. At Athens "victory" was but a moment, albeit an important one, in a continuum of local history. More polemical Christians could gloat over Athena's ejection while the more classically minded could develop a theory of conversion that rescued and carried along with it into the new order much of what they valued. Triumph preserved the memory of that which it had vanquished on the Akropolis.

The *Theosophy* oracle on the Parthenon

It was possible in Christian late antiquity to overcome the pagan past without consigning it to oblivion and even to redeem it in religious terms. In the ninth century, the scholar Photios (and future patriarch of Constantinople) reviewed a massive anonymous seventh-century compilation of passages whose goal was to prove that the wise men of all ancient nations had propounded doctrines that anticipated Christianity. Photios was not unsympathetic, though he faulted the book's bad style and sloppy standards of relevance.[82] (We will later examine evidence from Byzantium that made a similar effort on behalf of Athena at the Parthenon.)

One text in particular requires close discussion here, because it attests to a Christian attempt to appropriate and justify the pagan past of the Parthenon in late antiquity and has recently been used to support a fifth-century date

[79] See also the Appendix. [80] Pallas (1989) 887.

[81] Respectively: Fowden (1988) 56–57; Athanassiadi (1994) 37.

[82] Photios, *Bibliotheke* 170 (v. II, pp. 162–165; tr. Wilson pp. 154–155). For this strand of thought, see Beatrice (2001) xx–xxv.

for the temple's conversion (by Cyril Mango, who first brought attention to this obsure text in connection with the Parthenon). The text is the so-called *Tübingen Theosophy* – Tübingen because its library held the manuscript on which the first editions of this text were made; "Theosophy" means something like "Wisdom of God" or "Wisdom about God." What survives is an abridgment of a work composed around AD 500. The Byzantine epitomator, working possibly in the eighth century, explained that the original collection consisted of seven books on the true faith (these are lost) that were followed by another four (these are the surviving *Theosophy*). The aim of the latter was to show how pagan oracles, theology, and wisdom had anticipated the teachings of Christianity. The gods of the pagans it treated as false, of course, but many of their wise men spoke utterances that were inspired by the true God. So this was a collection similar to the one reviewed by Photios.

Among the surviving fragments, we find the following:

> In the days of the emperor Leon [457–474], the citizens of Kyzikos [on the south coast of the Sea of Marmara] were about to transform an idol temple that was as old as their city into a house of prayer for our most-glorious Lady, the Theotokos. At that time an oracle was found affixed to the side of the temple and carved on a large block. The same oracle was found in Athens, on the left side of the temple by the door, exactly identical to the other one. The citizens had asked Apollo in this way: "Prophesy to us, O Prophet, Titan Phoibos Apollo, whose should this house be?" And the oracle responded as follows: "Do whatever calls forth virtue and order. I, at any rate, announce a single triune God on High, whose imperishable *logos* will be conceived in a virgin. And he, like a fiery arrow, will streak through the world, gather up everything and bear it as a gift to his Father. This house will be hers, and her name is Maria."[83]

The point of the oracle is to validate the conversion with the authority of a pagan god, but it also partly redeems the temple's pagan past, whether it intended to do so or not. The temple had always been destined for the Theotokos, which makes its original use an intermediate waiting period rather, say, than a Satanic distortion of God's will. But Mango has declared the story to be problematic: "It is in some confusion, implying as it does that the same 'citizens' who were about to convert the temple into a church

[83] *Tübingen Theosophy* 53–54 (pp. 35–36). I see no reason to keep the manuscript error "Muria" for the name. A more ambitious edition of the text, with commentary, is now in Beatrice (2001) 26–27; for the context of Apolline oracles, Busine (2005) 396–431; for previous bibliography, van den Broek (1978) 118 n. 1; for this oracle, Mango (1995), with whose reading of the text I disagree on a key point (see below); also Ward-Perkins (1999) 238; Lane Fox (2005) 32–33; di Branco (2005) 96–98. For possibilities regarding the Kyzikos church, see Hasluck (1910) 23–24; Janin (1975) 203–205; and pp. 179–180 below.

consulted the oracle of Apollo (which is, of course, absurd)." Certainly, the oracle might have been circulated to persuade the pagans of Kyzikos and Athens to accept the takeover, though we will see that there is another solution to this problem. Moreover, the mention of Athens seems intrusive, possibly a scribal gloss that made its way into the text. That is, at first glance the story appears to have been about Kyzikos and later someone added, "Oh yes, and at Athens too."

The practice of citing pagan oracles to support Christian arguments was common in late antiquity, making pagan gods predict the coming of Christ. The *Theosophy*, a scholarly compilation, is one witness to this tradition,[84] which essentially began when St. Paul invoked the Unknown God worshiped by the Athenians and called upon the authority of their ancient poets in his attempt to convert them (Acts 17.23 and 17.28; see below). A different version of the story regarding the temple in Kyzikos and its oracle is found in two chronicles written in the century after the *Theosophy* (i.e., the sixth). According to this version, Iason and the Argonauts founded the temple at Kyzikos and asked Apollo to what god they should dedicate it. Their question and the oracle's response are the same as in the *Theosophy*. This solves the problem that Mango identified. It makes more sense that the oracle was consulted by the builders of the pagan temple than by the Christians later. In fact, if we read the version in the *Theosophy* carefully the error disappears, for we see that the citizens about to convert the temple were not necessarily the same as those who consulted the oracle; the latter lived long ago, carving the oracle's response in stone for their Christian descendants to find fifteen hundred years later. After all, the oracle must have been delivered in the past for it to be discovered when the temple was being converted. And, in fact, the narrative uses the aorist tense here, implying that the citizens who consulated the oracle did so before the main action of the story, which is set in the reign of Leon I. We can, therefore, imagine an original and complete version of the story which spoke of Iason's oracle and building of the temple followed by an account of its rediscovery when the temple of Kyzikos was converted during the late fifth century. The first part of the story is preserved in the two chronicles, the second in the *Theosophy*.

The two chronicles containing the Argonaut story are Ioannes Malalas (of Antioch; early sixth century) and Ioannes of Antioch (same name and city, but a different writer; early seventh century). Warren Treadgold has

[84] See Fowden (1986) 180–182; Beatrice (2001); Trombley (2001) v. II, 22–24, and the incident in v. I, 142; Saradi (2006) 384; Coptic: van den Broek (1978); Syriac: Brock (1992).

argued that when these two agree regarding events before ca. AD 500 they are probably drawing (independently) on Eustathios of Epiphaneia (in Syria), whose work is now lost. Eustathios' work reached to the first years of the sixth century, at which point he died, making him an exact contemporary of the original author of the *Theosophy* – and making both rough contemporaries of the temple-conversions at Kyzikos and Athens. We do not know whether Eustathios was using the *Theosophy* or vice versa for the text of the oracle, or whether they were using a common source. The main differences between them is that the *Theosophy* dates the event to Leon (457–474) and focuses on the conversion, while Eustathios (or the two chroniclers who used him) dates it to his successor Zenon (474–491) and focuses on the original foundation by Iason.[85] But what about Athens?

It is possible that the reference to Athens was part of the original version of the *Theosophy*. As it happens, we have another derivative collection of sayings that cites the same oracle, only this time without any mention of Kyzikos. Here it is introduced as an "inscription found on a block built into the so-called temple of the Athenian gods that belongs now to the Holy Theotokos." The manuscript that preserves this version dates to the eighth or ninth century, so the collection itself may be older, closer to the composition of the *Theosophy*. Later collections quote the same oracle text but with different introductions. One is framed as "the question posed by Iason, king of the Argonauts, to Apollo's Pythion, when the temple was being built." Or, "the seven wise men asked Apollo concerning the temple of Athens as follows ..." It is likely, then, that we have in all these later variants a selective use of a tradition that originally included both Athens and Kyzikos.[86] But Athens may, in the end, have priority over Kyzikos.

The earliest attestation of the text of the oracle is in one of the sermons of Theodotos, bishop of Ankyra in the second quarter of the fifth century and a participant in the theological disputes against Nestorios. The sermon, on the Mother of God and the Nativity, quotes the oracle in a different context from those we have seen so far. Bringing his oration to a conclusion, Theodotos cites Scriptural passages that predicted Christ's birth and then quotes and discusses our oracle in order to show that the Incarnation had been foretold also among the Greeks and the barbarians. In this version of the story, however, the oracle is given concerning the Altar of the Unknown God at Athens, the one that is mentioned by Paul in his speech in Acts 17.

[85] Ioannes Malalas, *Chronographia* 4.8; and Ioannes of Antioch fr. 2.15 (Müller p. 548) = fr. 26.2 (Roberto pp. 62–65). See Treadgold (2007) c. 4, 7, and 9.

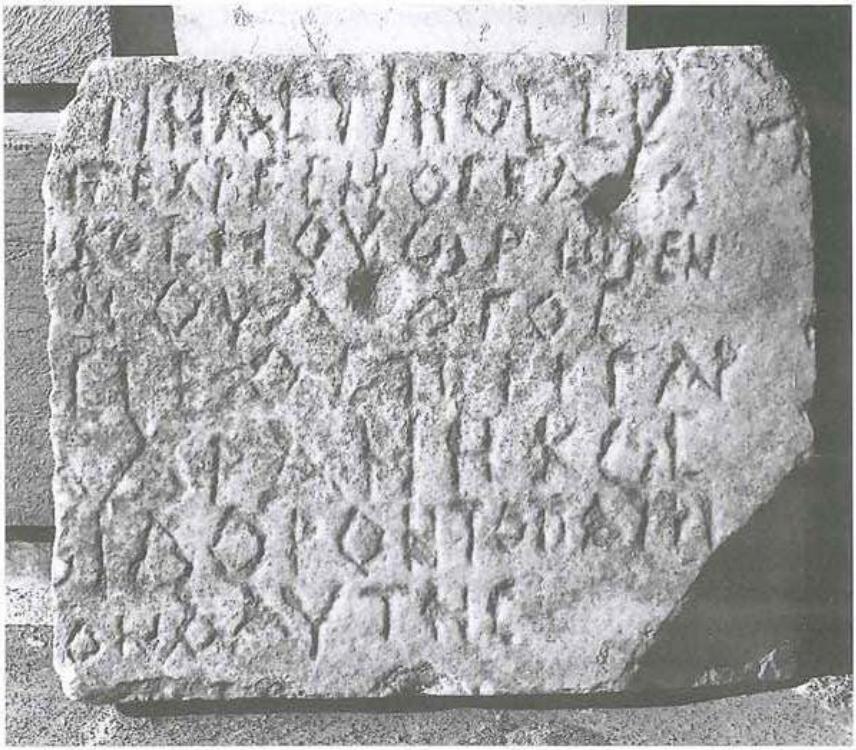
[86] Erbse (1995) xxiv–xxv, 99–100 and 113, 117. For these later versions, see Beatrice (2001) liv–lvi.

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Christian thinkers had proposed various explanations for the altar that Paul refers to in his speech. Theodotos is, it seems, our first witness to the oracle, which, he says, the Athenians inscribed on a stone block. Theodotos goes on to discuss the verse from Virgil's *Eclogues* (4.5.7) that some Christians took as a prediction of Christ's coming. Of course, few Greeks knew Virgil, but this verse was known in the Greek East, as it had been used in this way by no less an authority than the emperor Constantine and had been translated into Greek.[87]

It's time to come up for breath. We cannot, in the present state of research, know whether this oracle was originally invented for the Altar of the Unknown God at Athens (as our earliest source, Theodotos, claims), for the Parthenon, or for a temple in Kyzikos. An Athenian provenance seems likely. It is possible that it was invented to confirm St. Paul's claim that the Athenians had glimpsed something of the truth in erecting the Altar. But this is speculation. What we do know is that in the fifth and sixth centuries this oracle proved very adaptable, as its verses referred to God, his Son, and Maria, and could therefore be used in connection with any pagan monument, whether temple or altar, that was being given a new Christian meaning. Most scholars who have discussed the oracle have rejected it as "blatantly bogus," that is, as a literary invention, though some of the oracles quoted in the *Theosophy* have been confirmed epigraphically.[88] In other words, we are not necessarily dealing here with texts that circulated only among learned Christians. There is a possibility that the oracle in question was carved and placed where the text specifies that it was "found," namely "on the left side of the temple by the door" of the Parthenon. The location is precise and suggests authenticity. In fact, this same oracle was discovered on a fifth- or sixth-century inscription from the eastern Aegean island of

[87] Theodotos of Ankyra, *Homily on the Mother of God and the Nativity* 14 (p. 334). Other than Jugie's brief introduction (289–293), there apparently exists no critical scholarship on this bishop; see Foss (1977) 54 and n. 106. For his citation of the oracle, see Busine (2005) 423–425. For Virgil in Greek, see Fisher (1982) 177–182. The oracle is quoted and interpreted, again in connection with the Temple and Altar of the Unknown God at Athens, in a work (falsely) attributed to Athanasios of Alexandria: *Interpretation of the Temple in Athens* 1428c–1429a. Its aim is to help with converting those who have not heard the Gospel, and it includes in its arsenal the ancient philosophers who "dimly" perceived the coming of Christ; see Mercati (1964). For previous Christian explanations of the Altar in Acts 17, see van der Horst (1989) 1441–1442. For the debate over the original language of Constantine's oration, see Van Dam (2007) 196 n. 14.

[88] Robert (1968) and (1971). The quotation is from Beatrice (2002) 262, who rehabilitates other oracles in the collection. See now Busine (2005) 396–431.



12 Fragmentary inscription from Ikaria containing the right third of an oracle of Apollo also found in the *Tübingen Theosophy*, where it is linked to Athens and Kyzikos. A similar inscription may have been set up in the Christian Parthenon (photo from Matthaiou and Papadopoulos [2003] fig. 22.2). The fragment is about 0.5 m on a side, which would have made the whole about 1.5 m wide.

Ikaria (Fig. 12).[89] We are not, then, dealing with a purely literary text, but with a story and oracle that were made materially visible in at least one late antique locale, and possibly more. As for Kyzikos, by contrast, Malalas claims that the Argonauts wrote out the oracle on a block of marble with bronze letters. These descriptions may give us a glimpse into the accoutrements of converted temple-churches in late antiquity.

To conclude, by the end of the fifth century a pagan–Christian oracle was being circulated in connection with the conversion of the Parthenon, offering yet another indication of the dating of that event and confirming our suspicion that efforts were made at least in some circles to validate the monument's pagan past in Christian terms and, vice versa, to validate the

[89] *IG* 12.6.2 (2003) no. 1265 (pp. 595–596) = Matthaiou and Papadopoulos (2003) 61–64; for discussion, see now Deligiannakis (2006) 95–98 (I thank Dr. Deligiannakis for bringing this inscription to my attention).

Christian conversion in pagan terms. A Syriac collection of such oracles, which includes a translation of the story of Iason at Kyzikos, began as follows:

> Since a person is likely to believe testimonia from his own background rather than anything alien or from outside, we have diligently taken care to lay before you testimonia from certain wise men and philosophers who belong to the same religion as you.[90]

But this opens up lines of authority that can be traveled both ways.

Triumphalism, in short, was compatible with continuity in Athens, even entangled in it, and rarely expressed itself violently there as it did elsewhere. The point of the oracle in the *Theosophy* was to enable such a conjunction. A Christian could feel pride that Maria prevailed over Athena; an Athenian could feel pride in the antiquity and glory of his city's chief monument; and a Christian Athenian could feel both. At such a level of abstraction, all identities are rent by apparent or fundamental contradictions. We should not expect more consistency in this matter from Christian Athenians of the late fifth century AD. The custodians of the Parthenon, whether deliberately or not, gave out mixed signals about what the conversion of the temple meant. However they carried it out, under whatever ideological cover, it worked. A range of options, a diverse ideological repertoire, was made available for those who would admire the monument, from monks who marveled at the power and glory of the Mother of God to classicists and tourists who knew the temple's history and felt stirrings that they could not quite express in Christian terms. These reactions are reflected in the Byzantine evidence that we will examine below. In the end, triumph and continuity worked together to promote the Church of Athens among the diverse clientele that it attracted as it became one of the most important religious sites in the empire.

St. Paul in Athens

There was, then, something unique about Athens' transition to Christianity. At the site of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Constantine not only demolished the pagan temple that stood where he wanted to build a church, he had the polluted earth and rubble from the demolition removed far from

[90] Ed. and tr. in Brock (1992) 227.

the place of the Lord's Resurrection.[91] At Athens, by contrast, the temple of the "demon" Athena was converted into a church with minimal changes to its architecture and sculptural program. Even the gods on the pediments were left in place. The respect granted to the city's classical and pagan tradition by its Christian heirs would continue through the Byzantine, Latin, and Ottoman periods. At the end of this study, after we have looked at each piece of evidence separately, we will consider the ideological complications and psychological mechanisms of this unique modality of conversion.

We glimpse the origin of those mechanisms in the account in Acts of St. Paul's visit to Athens, which is one of the most bizarre episodes in the New Testament but which set the tone for the idiosyncratic fusion of Hellenism and Christianity that occurred there later. If "Athens," both the city and the ideal, could intimidate as formidable a man as he and wring ideological concessions from him, the text that recorded his reactions would have shaped the decisions of its citizens who were thinking about how to convert their city in later centuries.

The episode in Acts has generated controversy among scholars. At one extreme, Paul's speech is viewed as a forged interpolation that draws heavily upon pagan philosophical sources, while at the other it is taken as a faithful representation of what he really said.[92] We will not enter this debate here, as we are interested in the challenges faced by the Christians who converted Athens. It was to the text of Acts that Christian Athenians must have turned for guidance and inspiration, as it is the only place where their city is mentioned in the Bible. Paul's speech on the Areopagos shaped the perception that some later Christian writers had of Athens (especially Gregorios of Nyssa).[93] We saw above that the oracle in the *Tübingen Theosophy* in which Apollo predicts the conversion of the Parthenon had earlier been linked (by bishop Theodotos of Ankyra) to the Altar of the Unknown God mentioned by Paul. And we will see below that the Paul of Acts stands behind many accounts of pilgrimage to the Parthenon in Byzantine times.

[91] Eusebios, *Life of Constantine* 3.25-28 (pp. 132–133, with commentary on 274–281); Trombley (2001) v. I, 112–115.

[92] The debate began with Norden (1913). There is no way to review this book here, especially on the nuances of religious language. Its thesis for our purpose here, that Paul's speech was an interpolation based on a speech by Apollonios of Tyana, is no longer accepted. Norden was less interested in the literary effect of the extant account in Acts than in identifying its backgrounds (much scholarship from the early twentieth century dissolved specific texts into "context," leaving nothing concrete for those who want to know what these texts say). A recent commentary is by Conzelmann (1987) 137–149; for some of the speech's classical allusions, Delage (1956).

[93] Breitenbach (2003) 216–227; Rubenson (2006).

It was Paul who first enlisted pagan monuments in presenting the faith to Athens. This dimension of his Areopagos speech has generally been missed in modern commentaries, which primarily attempt to squeeze doctrine out of it. A dialectic is established in the speech between two different traditions, and the balance seems to have favored Athens (at least compared to what happens in the rest of Scripture).

The first thing we are told about Athens in Acts is that Paul's spirit was roused by the multitude of idols he saw there (17.16). (No modern museum can rival the effect.) He began by arguing with the local Jews – the verb is *dielegeto*, which is common in Acts but in this context may allude to Sokratic dialectic in the agora. Some Athenians happened to hear what he was saying. In particular, he was accosted by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. This is the only place in Scripture where these philosophical schools are mentioned and the only place where many philosophers appear. Paul's talk about these *xena daimonia* – foreign divinities – intrigued them and so they invited him to give a public exposition of this New Teaching – *kainê didachê* – on the Areopagos (17.18–19). It is not clear whether we are supposed to see an allusion to Sokrates here, who was put on trial precisely for preaching *kaina daimonia*. This allusion, if it is that, charges the scene with tension. As elsewhere in Acts, Paul is being set up for trouble, only in Athens he is cast as a new Sokrates, and this is one of many ways in which the philosophical tradition is engaged in this narrative. In antiquity, the Areopagos was a law court for trying capital cases; this council of leading Athenians took its name from the Hill of Ares to the northwest of the Akropolis, so the term could refer either to the hill or to the council regardless of where it met. But unlike their ancestors in the days of Sokrates, the Athenians of Paul's time had no interest in persecuting philosophers; most of them in this episode were philosophers themselves. "For all the Athenians and foreigners who are visiting in Athens like to do nothing more than hear or say something new" (17.21).

This is a curious strategy by the author of Acts, for it makes the Athenians both somewhat frivolous and yet also receptive to new ideas. They are apparently not resistant to listening, as were other people Paul addressed, and they might even be temporarily persuaded. But it implies that they may well turn to the next new idea after Paul's had become old in their ears. On the other hand, philosophers constantly exposed to new ideas are difficult to persuade; in fact, they are the only audience in both the Old and New Testament who are trained to object to ideas on intellectual grounds, rather than on the grounds of religion, tradition, or politics, the chief obstacles that Paul faced elsewhere. Athens presented a different challenge and called for new strategies.

Accordingly, Paul's speech on the Areopagos is unlike anything else the Apostle ever said, either in Acts or in his own Epistles, for here he was not addressing an audience made up of Jews and gentile sympathizers to Judaism. That common background was lacking. The Areopagos was not the diaspora of Jerusalem but the heart of Athens, whose own traditions also had a claim to universal devotion among mankind. This is the only place in Scripture where the Christian message is sown on truly foreign soil. Paul accordingly tried to work with and through Athenian tradition in making his case, and so fixed upon the Altar of the Unknown God. This altar is, in a sense, a testament to the Athenians' humility, for it acknowledges at least partial ignorance in religious matters and at the same time it demonstrates the citizens' religiosity that Paul praises, for only the will to worship all gods could erect such an altar. Without knowing it, then, the Athenians have apparently been worshiping Paul's God. In their paganism, they are not altogether outside the compass of God's grace. Paul tries to find space for his message within Athenian tradition and does not try to completely overthrow it. This, the first moment of Athenian Christianity, is respectful of Athens, but not entirely so. Paul's aim, after all, is to convince the Athenians to give up all their other gods except for this one whom they only dimly perceive. It was, quite possibly, to honor such foreign gods as the one Paul was about to proclaim that the ancestors of the Athenians had established the Altar in the first place. So whereas the philosophers were expecting something new, Paul clarified (or corrected) one aspect of something old, albeit unknown.[94]

Paul's address on the Areopagos follows a unique approach, compared at least to other passages in Acts and the Epistles. He begins to talk about God very generally, like a Deist, and moves slowly toward his specific message. "Do you see how he introduces philosophy one small piece at a time?" asked the preacher Ioannes Chrysostomos in the fourth century ("philosophy" means Christianity). Paul's suprisingly generic God does not dwell in handmade temples, which his audience of Epicureans and Stoics would have accepted, as Paul probably knew in advance. He even cites a philosophical poet, Aratos, to buttress his point about the descent of mankind from this Creator God, who is omnipresent. This citation, a nod to Greek

[94] For Altars of the Unknown Gods on the road to Phaleron, see Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.1.4. There are, then, two discrepancies: altars vs. altar and gods vs. god: see Conzelmann (1987) 140–141; van der Horst (1989). Jerome noted the second: see ibid. 1438; Tilliette (2005) 21. But few ancient readers would have made much of the difference, "God" being a generic term in Greek for all the gods (cf. "man" in English), and there were almost certainly many altars with different inscriptions anyway.

philosophy and poetry, made Chrysostomos uncomfortable. The preacher hastened to point out that Aratos was referring to Zeus while Paul was using the verse to refer to the Creator. "He was not referring to the same god as was the other, heaven forbid!" Chrysostomos was concerned here with religious contamination: the same verse could not be allowed to have the same referent. His anxiety stemmed from the possibility that future readers of Acts might be encouraged to adopt a stance of religious syncretism.[95] But, as a more recent divine has conceded, "the fact remains that, at least momentarily, Paul appears to occupy common ground with his pagan hearers to the extent of admitting a measure of validity to their observations concerning religion."[96] This set the tone for much of the subsequent history of the Christian Parthenon.

When Paul concluded his speech with a call for repentance and mentioned the Day of Judgment and Resurrection – the only part of his speech that touches on specifically Christian themes – the reaction of the audience was unlike that of any other in Acts, indeed the Bible. The resurrection of the dead elicited laughter from the Athenians, though there were some who wanted to hear more. *Chleuazô* – to ridicule – is a word that appears only here in Scripture (17.32).

Athens offered stony ground in which to sow the Gospel, which explains why Paul did not tarry long. The sources of resistance there were not the same as elsewhere, namely Jewish outrage and bored or annoyed Roman officials. This was not a Jewish city nor one of those barely Hellenized places in the badlands of Asia Minor where they worshiped living men as avatars of the gods. Quoting Scripture was no good here, one had to know Aratos. Athens was the only place where Paul encountered intellectual resistance from an audience that was used to dealing with weird theories, not different from a crowd of modern professors of classics or philosophy. Accordingly, Athens was the only place where Paul began from the first principles of theology, in short it was the only place where he had to philosophize and play by the rules of his hosts. His preaching took in pagan altars and Greek poets, for the first and last time. This was, of course, a ploy, and it failed. The author of Acts does not tell us how Paul, probably a humorless man, responded to the laughter. Elsewhere the Apostle made it more clear what he thought of "Athens":

[95] Ioannes Chrysostomos, *Homily 38 on Acts*. For Paul's use of Euripides in Romans, see Stowers (1994) 260–264. For Hellenistic Jews who suggested that the Jewish God could be understood as Zeus or any supreme God of another nation, see Hengel (1974) v. I, 264–266.

[96] Stonehouse (1949) 36, who otherwise insists on the "salutary recognition of the antithesis of Christianity and paganism" (35) and accordingly exculpates the Apostle.

The message of the cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation it is the power of God. As Scripture says, *I am going to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of any who understand. Where are the philosophers? Where are the experts?* [Isaiah 29.14, 19.12]. And where are the debaters of this age? Do you not see how God has shown up human wisdom as folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world was unable to recognize God through wisdom, it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the Gospel [1 Corinthians 1.18–21] ... Not many of you are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many from noble families. No, God chose those who by human standards are fools to shame the wise; he chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong, those who by human standards are common and contemptible – indeed those who count for nothing – to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something [1.26–28].[97]

Still, Paul's experience in Athens showed how the Christian message had to adapt to a unique set of local conditions. In Athens, classical culture had a say in how the Gospel was received. Paul's successors who converted the city four or even five centuries later would make similar concessions. In part, they may have been inspired by the account in Acts. At roughly the time of the conversion of the Parthenon, a student of the pagan philosopher Proklos produced a synthesis of Christianity and Neoplatonism. The pen name that he (or his first readers) gave to this corpus was of Paul's first and only named disciple in Athens, Dionysios the Areopagite (Acts 17.34). It was Acts that supplied the name and a spurious Apostolic authority for this attempt at a Christian-philosophical synthesis. The figure of this St. Denys would have a remarkable history in the medieval West, conflated with other real and imaginary men. In Byzantium too, "Dionysios" received the tributes of hagiography and encomium, which elevated his native city along with him.[98] Christian Athens had to adapt to its pagan past. In the ninth century, the patriarch Photios formulated this principle in responding to a certain Ioannes "the philosopher" who was troubled by the Apostle's use of an inscription on a pagan altar in preaching the truth: You have to adapt the truth to your audience.[99]

The Athenian episode in Acts provided the language and the themes for many future encounters in the city between Greek and Christian traditions, both positive and negative. Curiously, many of them were fictional, romanticized, or elaborated, beginning with Paul's own appearance; the *Theosophy* oracle; the complex traditions regarding "Dionysios"; the probably

[97] Tr. from *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1990) 1325.
[98] di Branco (2000–2001) 636–639; (2005) 73–78. [99] Photios, *Letter* 63 (v. I, 107).

fictional visit – for postgraduate work – of Ioannes Chrysostomos (attested in a seventh-century *vita*); and the apocryphal and entertaining compilation of the *Acts of Philippos* (of the fourth and fifth centuries). This begins by following the model of Paul at Athens, but then enters the realm of fantasy. Philippos confronts no fewer than 300 Athenian philosophers who wished to learn "something new," but when they invite the High Priest of Jerusalem who comes with his posse of 500, Christ appears in the heavens and many miracles ensue, including blindings, the slow sinking of the High Priest into the Attic soil, and the breaking of all the city's temples and altars and the flight of its demons.[100]

Yet it was also Paul who had cited a pagan poet and pointed to a pagan altar in making his case for the Christian God. It was perhaps this that stimulated the fabrication – yet another one – of a pagan oracle that predicted the coming of Christ. This oracle would later be used to justify the conversion of the Parthenon, destined to become the greatest monument in Byzantium of Christian Hellenism. What did Athens, in the end, have to do with Jerusalem? This question could not be asked so flippantly by anyone who cared about the survival of Athens in the Christian world. It called for strategies and solutions, not polemical and ironic postures. Yet Christian Athens had to be invented from almost nothing. The next chapter will examine the scanty evidence for the transitional period between late antique Athens, the city of schools and pagan philosophy, and Byzantine Athens, the city of the Christian Parthenon. Paul's performance in Acts had, in broad terms, shown how this transition could be effected. Others now had to find a way to make their city, once "full if idols," into a center of Christian worship that attracted pilgrims rather than students.

[100] *Acts of Philippos* 2 (pp. 41–75); see Amsler (1999) c. 2; di Branco (2005) 67–69.

2 | From students to pilgrims in medieval Athens (AD 532–848)

The collapse of the late Roman city

Pilgrims are often difficult to tell apart from tourists or those who travel for other reasons, such as study. Athens in Roman times was a hub for all such travel. Many went there to study rhetoric and philosophy under a famous teacher, to see the landmarks, monuments, and public art, to witness the Panathenaic festival, or be initiated in the mysteries at Eleusis. Often many of those motives were jumbled together, making it difficult to identify pure types in the record. For the early and late empire our evidence is extensive enough that we can sometimes be selective with our categories. But after Justinian's closure of the schools Athens (like many other places of the empire) entered a dark age from which almost no information survives, and even that is usually greeted with skepticism. I will review this body of evidence carefully here because it tells us more than has been realized. Each individual piece is more credible individually than historians have thought, and taken altogether it paints an unmistakable picture of cultural transformation. In late antiquity, the majority of travelers to Athens were young men seeking education in the schools: this was the age of Julian and Gregorios of Nazianzos in the fourth century, Proklos in the fifth, and Damaskios in the late fifth and early sixth. During the course of the seventh and eighth centuries we observe a shift in the motives of those who came, so that by the middle Byzantine period we can talk confidently of Christian pilgrims to the Parthenon. It was the temple, now a church, that became the main focus of attraction and drew pilgrims from distant places of the Christian world.

Before I discuss the evidence for Dark Age Athens in detail, I should outline the broader historical context, because the city's transition from university town to pilgrimage center occurred in the midst of catastrophic events that almost overwhelmed the Roman state in the seventh and early eighth centuries. After all, in a state reduced to one fourth of its territory and fighting for survival on all fronts, higher education was not the top priority. Cities fell to ruin, the demography and economy contracted, and the culture

shed the last vestiges of overt paganism. Athens entered this Dark Age after the closure of the Academy in the sixth century. There is some evidence that the city was (again) attacked and destroyed, this time around 580 by Slavs. The area of ash and ruin, to which residents had long grown accustomed both inside and outside the walls, expanded, now taking in parts of the agora. Coin hoards were secreted by people who never came back to retrieve them.[1]

Dramatic historical changes were taking place, as the empire was set upon by enemies both old and new. Italy, recently reconquered and then destroyed by Justinian's generals and tax-collectors, was invaded by Lombards, leading to a patchwork of Byzantine and barbarian-controlled regions across the peninsula. The Slavic subjects of the Avar empire began to raid in Greece in the late sixth century and began to settle in parts of the Balkans in the seventh. Byzantium lost many regions in northern and western Greece and did not recover them until almost two centuries later. Meanwhile, the Persians had invaded and gradually conquered the entire Near East in the early seventh century, leading to total war between the two empires that lasted for an entire generation and left both sides exhausted. The Arabs swept up the pieces in the 630s and 640s and began to raid deep into Asia Minor. Constantinople itself barely escaped capture in two long blockades (674–678, 717–718). A new threat from the north, the Bulgars, replaced the Avars and established a strong state south of the Danube. The Roman empire was now hard-pressed on all fronts, and had to confront its enemies with greatly diminished resources and manpower.

There has been considerable debate among historians regarding the fate of the Roman cities in this turbulent age. No one denies that the urban population contracted and that standards of living declined, in some case drastically. New construction came to a virtually complete stop and higher culture, expressed in terms of public support for teaching and the arts, almost disappeared. Very few texts were written in this period, certainly in comparison to the extraordinarily prolific sixth century, and most of these were of a religious and liturgical nature. As we will see, it is often by chance or from foreign sources that we gain any glimpses of cultural and philosophical activity going on inside the empire. These developments precipitated a massive cultural shift. The cities lost all remaining traces of their classical ideology, which they had retained to a degree even in late antiquity. No longer were they understood as political communities where alone it was possible to live the good life and exercise the highest social and intellectual

[1] Metcalf (1962).

virtues. It was now the army and religious orders that drew the most ambitious and capable men. The cities' concern was now for survival, and they valued their walls, citadels, and garrisons more than their bathhouses and theaters.

Speaking broadly, the Christian and Roman empire of late antiquity, whose elites spoke the same cultural language from Gaul to Syria and whose struggles were largely internal, was succeeded by what was effectively the city-state of Constantinople, struggling to retain a few cities and territories strung out along the Mediterranean coast. This was the ruin of antiquity. The Romans of Byzantium felt surrounded by a sea of darkness, hatred, and paganism, and they viewed themselves as the sole spot on earth illuminated by God's grace, which usually took the form of punishment.

The transformation of the cities has generated a large bibliography. Grand theories of continuity and, then, discontinuity have given way to a case-by-case approach, as historians scrutinize the archaeological remains and terse chronicle entries. The cities of Asia Minor faced different challenges from those in Greece, and even neighboring cities in the same region may have experienced different histories, because of their location, walls, or chance. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence about Athens to discuss its urban transformation. We are better placed to describe what the city was like in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which I will do in a later chapter. As for the seventh and eighth centuries, all we can do is conjecture. The city was never lost to the empire, so it must have hosted a constant presence of military and administrative personnel. The population must have declined, probably dramatically, and so many buildings would have been deserted and gradually ruined. The damage inflicted by the Heruls (AD 267), Goths (396), and Slavs (ca. 580) was never fully repaired and so many areas of the city and its suburbs would have been abandoned, some of them burned, and then overgrown. It is impossible to talk of either private or public life in this period. Previously public areas were certainly taken over for private use without challenge by the authorities, who were now primarily concerned with taxation and defense. Cities (*poleis*) came to be identified as forts (*kastra*), defined more by their walls than their civic institutions. It is hard to say more beyond this.[2]

The goal of this chapter is to argue that something more *can* be said, at least about Athens. The emergence of the Christian Parthenon as a major site can

[2] Most of the large bibliography on the cities' fate is cited conveniently in Brandes (1999) 32 n. 33. Haldon (1999) 1–23 is a useful survey; Treadgold (1990) remains thought-provoking. For the sixth century, we now have a massive survey by Saradi (2006).

be traced to the Dark Age. Athens probably continued to be an important center of learning in the seventh century, but during the course of the following century students were gradually replaced by pilgrims; the city adapted to a different clientele and emerged transformed in the middle Byzantine period. It never fully lost its reputation for giving the world literature and philosophy, and its ancient passion for idolatry, attested in Acts, was never forgotten. Yet the custodians of the Parthenon successfully changed the city's image and, by promoting the cult of the Theotokos on the Akropolis, transformed it into a famous Christian center worthy of imperial patronage.

Traveling to Athens in the Dark Age

During the Roman empire and until the sixth century Athens was famous as a center of higher education. Whatever the makeup of its society and the basis of its economy, which certainly depended on more than students and their fees, the city was identified with its schools.[3] It was the most famous university town in the empire. It had the history and monuments to give that reputation plausibility and validity. It is therefore understandable that this reputation clung to the city after the collapse of urban civilization in the seventh century and the decline of higher learning. Many learned men of that later period are said in our sources to have been educated at Athens, and lives of late antique saints that were rewritten after ca. 600 sometimes now included (invented?) episodes of sojourn and study there (for example, in the seventh-century *vita* of Ioannes Chrysostomos that I discussed above).[4]

Historians tend to dismiss these episodes as literary commonplaces, especially when they are made about men of the Dark Age. Saying that someone was educated in Athens basically meant only that he had a high level of classical education (and even that can often be questioned). When writing for an audience in Armenia or the Latin West, it didn't matter so much where the saint or scholar had actually studied. If he had studied in any Greek-speaking land and had a classical or philosophical education, saying that he had attended the schools of Athens sufficed to impress. The "Athenian philosopher" remained a familiar character in the Byzantine imagination even during the Dark Age.[5]

[3] See now Watts (2006).

[4] Georgios of Alexandria, *Life of Ioannes Chrysostomos* 4 (pp. 78–88). See pp. 21–22 above.

[5] Dagron (1984) 99, 102–103, 115–116, 123–124. For a survey of Byzantine education in the Dark Age, see Lemerle (1986) c. 4.

Some scholars have therefore dismissed this kind of claim as a topos, a literary or rhetorical convention of little historical value.[6] But this position faces a number of problems. Most obviously, something may be a topos and yet also be true. Some or all of these men may have studied at Athens. Even the account of Ioannes Chrysostomos' brief stay at Athens has found a defender, at least of its core elements (though I am not persuaded in this specific case).[7] Second, the topos in question is invoked more often than historians have realized, in sources that are independent of each other. Granted, this is not a strong argument for authenticity as a topos may be used any number of times. In the end, we must examine each case individually, which brings us to the final point. When all the evidence is considered, some of the biographies are circumstantially plausible. Moreover, one account in particular (regarding Stephanos of Sougdaia) makes a unique claim that has not been recognized, which removes the episode from the sphere of rhetoric and places it within the history of the emerging Parthenon cult. So let us look more carefully at the early medieval students of Athens.

When Justinian closed the schools in 529, or did whatever it was that he did to cause the schools or some schools to shut down in 529 or in 531,[8] the professors of Platonic philosophy decided that they could no longer live in the Christian empire. Under the leadership of Damaskios, they traveled to Persia hoping to find a favorable environment for philosophy. The new king Chosroes (Khusrow I), who was to gain a reputation in his own land for learning and even scholarship, welcomed them warmly, ostentatiously protecting the intellectuals persecuted by his rival Justinian. But the philosophers disliked Persian society. It happened at that very time (AD 532) that the empires were concluding a peace treaty, known as the Eternal Peace (though it lasted for only seven years). At the insistence of Khusrow, a clause was inserted protecting the philosophers from harassment. This clause was possibly authored by Damaskios. The philosophers were free to return to Roman territory and we know that they did so, only we do not know where they went (assuming each did not go his separate way). This has posed something of a riddle to historians. One proposed that at least the prolific commentator Simplikios simply returned to Athens and picked up where he had left off before Justinian's not-so-final closing of the schools. This would

[6] E.g., Curta (2004) 523–524 n. 32. Others are cautious: Browning (1989) IV 300; Herrin (1973) 121.

[7] Trombley (2001) v. I, 295–303, 333–341. Much in the narrative cannot be historical.

[8] The latest examination is by Watts (2005); (2006) 128–139.

establish a degree of continuity in teaching at Athens into the mid-century. Unfortunately, it cannot be proven, nor can any of the alternative theories.[9]

There is, however, evidence that philosophers were still coming out of Athens in the late sixth century and that others traveled there to study. It has recently been shown that Stephanos, who taught philosophy in Alexandria in the late sixth century, was the same man as a writer of medical and philosophical treatises and commentaries called Stephanos of Athens in the manuscripts. He was later summoned to teach at Constantinople by the emperor Herakleios after 610 (but certainly by 619–620).[10] Of course, we do not know Stephanos' level of education when he left his native Athens, so his career does not directly testify to the survival of higher education in that city. But he must have received at least the rudiments of education there, and the fact that he is identified as an Athenian in many manuscripts indicates that his link to his home city was based on more than merely having spent his teenage years there. For all we know, he was educated and also began his teaching career there.

This conclusion is reinforced by what we are told about one of Stephanos' students named Tychikos by Anania of Širak, a seventh-century Armenian scholar (born ca. 600). In a brief autobiographical text, Anania recounts how he traveled in pursuit of knowledge to Theodosioupolis, Constantinople, and then Trebizond, where he studied under the Byzantine mathematician Tychikos, who had learned Armenian. Anania was so devoted to the memory of his teacher that he included a digression on his search for wisdom. After various adventures, in the early seventh century Tychikos traveled in search of knowledge to Jerusalem, where he stayed for a month; to Alexandria, where he studied for three years; and finally to Constantinople, where he studied for a long time under a teacher from Athens, that "city of philosophers." It has been argued persuasively that this teacher was none other than Stephanos of Athens, and that Anania's own philosophical outlook – and, by extension, the scientific tradition of medieval Armenia – reflected the Athenian origin of his teacher's teacher.[11] Stephanos must have owed more to Athens than the mere fact of his birth, given that Tychikos and Anania continued to identify him that way, unless of course they too were exaggerating the case in order to link

[9] The story is in Agathias, *Histories* 2.30–31; see Kaldellis (1999a) 251–252. Athens: Cameron (1969).

[10] Wolska-Conus (1989); tentatively accepted by Roueché (1990) 124–125.

[11] For a translation of Anania's autobiography, see Berbérian (1964); for Stephanos and Tychikos, Wolska-Conus (1989) 20–33; for Anania, Lemerle (1986) 90–93, who suggests that the words "a teacher from Athens, that city of philosophers," were later additions to the text, though they were made to clarify Stephanos' background, not invent it; for these journeys in general, Dimitroukas (1997) v. I, 195–197.

themselves more closely to the famous city of philosophers, by applying the topos to someone who actually was from there!

The later Armenian tradition knew the Athenian topos well. The Armenian Father of History, Movses Xorenac'i, who wrote the first *History of the Armenians*, claims to have lived in the mid fifth century and to have studied in Palestine (i.e., Jerusalem), Alexandria, Rome, and Athens; from there on to Constantinople and finally back to Armenia. But this Father of History was also a Father of Lies, and more so than his Greek counterpart. Movses probably lived in the eighth century and not the fifth. As a historian he was not above invention and deception. His educational pilgrimage was most likely an elaborated version of the story told by Anania about Tychikos.[12]

Evidence for Athens in the early seventh century comes from the West. According to pope Zacharias (741–752), Theodoros of Tarsos, the archbishop of Canterbury (669–690) and reformer of the Church of England, had studied in Athens: *Theodorus, Greco-Latinus ante philosophus et Athenis eruditus, Romae ordinatus, pallio sublimatus, ad prefatam Brittaniam transmissus.* Our main source for Theodoros' life, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, says little about his life before his arrival in England, and so scholars have had to speculate based on hints in his writings. Zacharias' solid statement has not, by contrast, been received favorably. Theodoros was born in 602 in Tarsos (in southeastern Asia Minor) and his later works suggest that he had studied in Antioch and Constantinople, perhaps even under Stephanos of Athens/Alexandria, before moving to Rome as a monk. Zacharias was writing in 748, so over fifty years after Theodoros' death, and his claim is generally dismissed.[13]

Yet Zacharias may be credible. The Byzantine emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, writing in the mid tenth century, reports that Zacharias was himself an Athenian. We have no evidence to contradict this claim, and although Konstantinos VII lied about a great many things, especially in this section of his work, he had no motive to lie about this particular fact, which he reports casually (nor is he using the topos of an Athenian education). Zacharias has gone down in history as the last Greek pope, and has even been credited with translating Latin texts into Greek, such as Gregorius the

[12] Movses Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* 3.62 (pp. 337–339; cf. 2–3, 60 for a discussion). See Thomson (1994b) IV 145.

[13] Zacharias, *Letter to Boniface, 1 May 748* (p. 173). Skepticism: Frantz (1968) 199–200 n. 78; Mango (1984b) VI 685–686. For Theodoros in general, though without discussing this problem (so implicitly rejecting Zacharias), see Lapidge (1995). Savvides (1987–1989) and Constantelos (1998) 166–167 accept it, but also uncritically accept events in his life that are modern inventions.

Great's *Dialogues*. The entry on him in the *Book of Pontiffs*, which was written by a near contemporary, says that he was of Greek origin, the son of Polychronios. There is no reason to assume that this refers specifically to south Italian origin (Calabrian), as is usually done. As an Athenian, Zacharias might well have known what he was talking about when he said that Theodoros had been educated in that city. In this case, it is possible that Athens in the seventh and eighth centuries gave at least two learned prelates to the medieval West.[14]

The strangest (and quite possibly legendary) case of a seventh-century Athenian is the western ascetic saint Gislenus (or Ghislain, a name with many variants), who lived as a hermit in Belgium, holding converse with many other saints of that region; he died ca. 680. The chronicle of the bishops of Cambrai contains a brief note on his activities, stating that he was from Athens: *ab Athenis digressus*.[15] His *vita*, compiled in the tenth century, goes further and claims that Gislenus was an Athenian, born and bred, and had studied philosophy in Athens before traveling north.[16] It is hard to know what to make of this claim. The *vita* contains a fairly long account of his childhood and education, though it offers no specific information about Athens and smacks of invention. But why bother to invent this? Gislenus was not a scholarly saint. Moreover, it was no part of the Athenian topos to have one's hero born and raised in Athens. Later in the *vita* Gislenus insists on two occasions that he was a Greek from Athens (*de Athenis, nobilissima Graecorum urbe*), which goes beyond the needs of the Athenian topos, limited as that was to education. An explanation for all this has, however, been proposed by Anne-Marie Helvétius. Gislenus, she argues, was invented in the tenth century for political reasons (which we need not rehearse here) and his life was modeled on that of St. Denys, who, in the West, was identified with the Athenian Areopagite converted by Paul, later the Apostle to the Gauls.[17]

Still, the possibility of learned Athenians traveling to the West should not be ruled out. In the early ninth century, Alcuin, one of Charlemagne's chief theological advisors, wrote a letter discussing an exegetical question on 1 Corinthians posed at the palace, as he claims, by "a certain wise Greek (*sapiens Grecus*)," whom he later identifies as "an Athenian sophist of the Academic School (*Atheniensis sophista ex academica schola*)." This letter

[14] Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 27.16 (pp. 114–115). For some of the problems of this text, see Lounghis (1990). Cf. *Liber Pontificalis*: Zacharias 93 (p. 35). Calabria: Marcou (1977) 274. On Zacharias in general, see Lilie *et al.* (2001) 105 (no. 8614).

[15] *Gesta episcoporum Cameracensium* 1.19 (p. 409).

[16] *Life of Gislenus* col. 1030; cf. Frantz (1968) 200 n. 78.

[17] Helvétius (1994) 213–234.

attests the presence of a Byzantine theologian from Athens at the court of Aachen.[18] His "Academic" training is surely a flourish by Alcuin; how literally shall we take the claim that he was an Athenian?

While our evidence for teaching in seventh-century Athens comes from two western sources, our evidence for the eighth century comes from the East. Specifically, Step'annos of Siwnik', an Armenian scholar and saint of the early eighth century who translated important theological texts, is known from a number of sources to have traveled to Byzantium to learn Greek and acquire manuscripts. The story goes that he was once bested in a debate by a heretical Dyophysite prince – i.e., Orthodox from the Byzantine perspective (Armenians were mostly Monophysites) – and so he traveled to Constantinople and possibly Rome to hone his philosophical and theological skills. Step'annos Orbelean, a fourteenth-century Armenian historian, is the only source to report that he also traveled to Athens because "it was called the mother of philosophy." This should alert us to a possible topos. Moreover, Orbelean places Athens in Spain, but this bizarre error has cleverly been explained away by the fact that when Orbelean was writing Athens was in fact under Catalan rule. Gross ignorance is thereby turned into detailed and accurate contemporary knowledge.[19]

It is, of course, impossible to know whether Step'annos really did visit Athens. The entry in the Armenian *Synaxarion* (a collection of notices for saints arranged according to the calendar, with each included under his feast-day) says that he studied Greek literature in Constantinople and that among the authors he translated was (pseudo-) "Dionysios the Athenian" (i.e., the Areopagite), "the disciple of Paul." Step'annos' translation of Dionysios in fact survives.[20] This might explain why he was believed by Orbelean and his sources to have studied in Athens (assuming that he had not): the Athenian topos is here combined with the fact that Step'annos translated the works of a (putative) Athenian saint. On the other hand, Armenians had a tradition of study in Athens. In the fourth century, Gregorios of Nazianzos attests to the

[18] Alcuin, *Letter* 307 (p. 470); cf. Berschin (1980) 163. This was too early for Athonite to be confused with Athenian.

[19] Step'annos Orbelean, *History of Siwnik'* 31 (v. I, pp. 81–82). See Gero (1973) 143–146; for the Catalan period, see Setton (1948).

[20] *Le Synaxaire arménien* 767–769 (July 23). See Thomson (1994c) XIV. Further sources for Step'annos include a chronicle compiled ca. 1100 under the name of Movses Dasχuranc'i (or Kałankatuac'i), which devotes one chapter (3.17) to his life and journeys to the West (Rome and Constantinople), but says nothing about Athens (pp. 210–211). There follows a hilarious retelling of the Trojan War (3.18). Much the same can be found in Kirakos of Ganjak's thirteenth-century *History of the Armenians* 71–74 (pp. 65–68). In general, see Lilie *et al.* (2001) 230 (no. 6989).

presence of Armenian students at Athens, when he was there with his friend Basileios, the future bishop of Kaisareia. One of the greatest teachers of rhetoric in Athens at that time was Prohairesios, who hailed from Persian Armenia. The Armenian script and literary and theological canon were in fact developed by Armenians who had studied in Byzantium; their translation of many theological and philosophical works (Step'annos labored at the tail end of this movement) has been named the "Hellenizing School."[21] There would be nothing strange if Step'annos had followed their footsteps to Athens.

Besides, the frequency of the Athenian topos cuts both ways. If the belief that Athens was the "mother of philosophy" was so widespread, then young men planning to travel abroad for their studies were likely to want to go there. And can it be that they then found *no* learning there with which to quench their thirst? Be that as it may, the reasons for traveling to Athens were about to change dramatically; perhaps they had already been changing but outside the attention of our scanty sources for this period. The shift is first apparent in the biography of Stephanos of Sougdaia, an eighth-century saint from Kappadokia who became the iconophile bishop of Sougdaia (Shurož) in the Crimea. Our sources for his life are poor. Controversy has mainly centered on a fifteenth-century Slavo-Russian *vita*, suspected of being inauthentic and, in part, unhistorical. Fortunately, we do not have to enter that debate. That Stephanos went to Athens and met orators and philosophers is attested in a brief and late Greek *vita* that takes the form of a *Synaxarion* entry. But that is not all that the entry says; what it actually says – and the significance of this has been missed – is that at the age of 18 Stephanos

> left his homeland and went to Athens because he desired to worship and pray at the church of the Mother of God. While there he encountered philosophers and orators who were native to the place and conversed with all of them and learned not a few things.

In other words, philosophy was not the primary purpose of his journey. He studied that only after he had reached Athens and fulfilled his original desire, which was to pray in the Parthenon. This is the precise point in our

[21] Gregorios of Nazianzos, *Funeral Oration for Basileios* 17. Prohairesios: Eunapios, *Lives of the Philosophers and the Sophists* 487; for his career, see Watts (2006) c. 3. For Armenian students abroad and the Hellenizing School, see Terian (1982); Thomson (1994a) I 145 and (1994b) IV; McLynn (2006) 230. Thomson is neutral on the question of whether Step'annos went to Athens. It does not seem to me that his travels were modeled on those of Anania's teacher Tychikos.

sources that pilgrimage to the Parthenon replaces philosophical study as the goal of traveling to Athens.[22]

Historians who have doubted the historicity of this text have failed to note that it contains this new and authenticating element.[23] Visiting the Christian Parthenon was no part of the classical Athenian topos. One may doubt that eighth-century Athens was full of orators and philosophers – though we should not rule out the possibility that it had a few – but it is unreasonable to doubt that Stephanos went on a pilgrimage to the Parthenon. Why would the author invent that? Certainly, he was writing some two centuries after the event, when, as we will see, the Parthenon was well established as a major pilgrimage center in the Byzantine world. But we have no other case where a visit to the Parthenon was invented out of nothing. The only other case of such distortion – and it is only a possibility – concerns St. Phantinos in the tenth century, who certainly did go to Athens, as his *vita* tell us, but may not have done so primarily in order to visit the Parthenon, as his *Synaxarion* entry has it.[24] But this distortion concerns only Phantinos' *motive* for going, not the fact that he did go. Likewise in the case of Stephanos. The synaxarist must have been following a source that attested the visit, and perhaps he himself only supplied the motive for it. But that motive, namely the desire to pray at the Parthenon, is plausible and may have been true, as it was around Stephanos' lifetime that the Parthenon was emerging as a major Christian shrine. This is attested by the inscriptions that I will discuss shortly.

Paradoxically, it would suit the broader argument of this book better if Stephanos did *not* go to Athens, or did not go in order to pray at the Parthenon. For Stephanos, after all, was only one man, whose travels and motives were all his own. But a synaxarist was writing for a very broad audience, and what he wrote reflected what both he and that audience believed was plausible. At the same time, it shaped their beliefs about what was worth doing, about why it was worth going to Athens. In other words, the truth tells us only about what one man did, whereas a fiction tells us about what many men believed and were likely to do, namely travel to Athens in order to pray at the Parthenon. In some cases, a fiction can be

[22] *Life of Stephanos of Sougdaia* (p. 73). The key sentences are quoted also by Charanis (1959) 41 n. 109; paraphrased with context and bibliography by Kalogeras (2002) 99. For sources and studies, see Lilie *et al.* (2001) 232–233 (no. 6997). For the Slavic *vita*, see da Costa-Louillet (1940–1941) 242–244.

[23] E.g., Ševčenko (1975) 114, without discussing the Athenian connection; Macrides and Magdalino (1992) 143. But see Pritsak (1988–1989) 95–101.

[24] See Chapter 4.

truer than a fact,[25] in part because it eliminates individual exigencies and pares reality down to its perceived essentials. Henceforth, people went to Athens to pray in the Parthenon.

To conclude, the evidence can be read in opposite ways. On a skeptical reading it tells us nothing about Athens except that its ancient contributions to philosophy and literature were vaguely remembered in the early Middle Ages, in places as distant as Belgium and Armenia. Or else in the late sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries the city continued its tradition of higher education, including among its graduates a scholarly pope; a dynamic archbishop of Canterbury; a Belgian saint; and the founders of the Armenian philosophical tradition. There is probably no way out of this impasse. We simply do not have enough historical context for this period to help us decide which alternative is more plausible, or whether we may postulate a middle ground between them. What we do see in the evidence, however, is the survival of international Christian orders despite the massive disruptions of the seventh century. It was still possible to go from Syria to an archbishopric in England, from Armenia to Rome in search of books, and from Kappadokia to Sougdaia, and still be part of the same religious and even cultural network. In this context of mobility, Athens must have benefited from its position on the crossroads between East and West. Perhaps it still capitalized on its ancient reputation to attract young men eager for learning. Yet toward the end of this period, the city began to cultivate a different profile. When our sources again become plentiful, we find that Athens has been identified with the cult of the Theotokos in the Parthenon. We do not hear of students again, at least not for many centuries.

In the following chapters I will examine the evidence for the Parthenon cult in the middle Byzantine period, including the many monks who came from afar to climb the Akropolis in the tenth and eleventh centuries; the emperor who graced it with his munificence; and the apogee of the Theotokos of Athens in the twelfth century, when its fame and name spread to the farthest reaches of the empire. But first, in the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the place of Athens in the Byzantine revival of the eighth and ninth centuries. Though little evidence survives about the city from this period, so that it is impossible to write a conventional history, any scrap of information may help us to understand the rise to prominence of the Parthenon cult. Against this background, we can better understand why it was in this period that secular officials, Athenian clergy, and pilgrims felt compelled to carve their names on the temple's columns and walls.

[25] Cf. Crossan (1995) 111–112.

Athens and Constantinople

The few studies that have been devoted to Greece in the seventh and eighth centuries have promoted the idea that Athens was an insignificant backwater town, far from any place where real history happened. Certainly this is true if our standard of comparison is the Athens of Perikles, ruling the Aegean and invading Egypt. But we have to adjust for the lack of sources, which makes the entire empire except Constantinople appear as one vast backwater. That does not mean that nothing happened in other places. And, given the realities of imperial strategy, Athens may have been more important than is generally realized.

First, Athens was one of the few large towns in Greece that the empire still possessed after the mid seventh century and it was used as a base for imperial operations. The emperor Konstas II (641–668) spent the winter of 662–663 there with his court, fleet, and army, before moving on to Italy and Sicily. Our sources, both western, say that he traveled from Constantinople to Athens and from there to Tarentum. We do not know why Athens was preferred over Corinth, and we have no information about what the emperor did in Athens. But his presence has been linked to a large number of his coins that have been found there, large, that is, compared to finds dating to the preceding and following reigns.[26]

The Parthenon was a Christian church by the time of Konstas' visit. It had also probably become the city's metropolis, and so the majority of the services attended by the emperor would have taken place there. Unfortunately, this is also the worst documented period of Byzantine history, and our western sources do not highlight the emperor's interest in the church of the Mother of God. If, then, the Parthenon was already established as a center of Christian pilgrimage as it would be soon, we do not expect to hear of it from these sources, which are not primarily interested either in Greece or in the emperor.

The armies of Greece and the islands launched a rebellion against the emperor Leon III in 727 with the intention of setting a certain Kosmas on the throne. Our (iconophile) sources depict this as a response to Leon's edict against icons, but it was probably part of the general climate of military instability in this period and had nothing to do with icons. Their fleet made

[26] Our main source is Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 5.6 (*MGH* p. 146), followed by *Liber Pontificalis*: Vitalianus 78 (p. 71). Coins: Charanis (1955); for a new interpretation of Dark Age Balkan coin finds, including Athens, see Curta (2005) 118–119, and 123 for the importance of Athens; for the context of Konstas' reign, Kaegi (2006).

it to Constantinople, where it was attacked with Greek fire and surrendered.[27] At this time, Greece was also home to many skilled workmen, for in 766, after many years of plague and drought, the emperor Konstantinos V relocated hundreds of craftsmen to the capital in order to repair the aqueduct, including 550 potters from Greece and the islands (their job was probably to make the clay pipes).[28] In 769, Konstantinos V chose a maiden from Athens named Eirene to marry his son, the future Leon IV. We do not know why he chose her; she seems to have been an orphan, but was related to the Sarantapechys family, of some local importance. Unfortunately, we know nothing about her background and early life. She turned out to be one of the most ambitious and ruthless rulers of Byzantium, eventually blinding her son Konstantinos VI so as to rule in her own name (797–802).[29] She also attempted to reverse her father-in-law's policy against icons, with mixed results. In late 797, there was a plot against her in the capital that aimed to place the five sons of Konstantinos V on the throne. She banished them all to Athens, where they were guarded by her uncle, the provincial governor Konstantinos Serantapechos. The next year a Slavic chieftain named Akamir planned a rebellion in their favor with support from local Byzantine soldiers, but Eirene had the princes all blinded.[30] She was soon deposed herself (in 802). In 807, the emperor Nikephoros I, who had seized the throne from her, held a bride-show to select a wife for his son and heir Staurakios (this was a popular method for choosing future empresses at the court in the eighth and ninth centuries). The winner was another Athenian, this one named Theophano, in fact a relative of Eirene. But Staurakios was mortally wounded in the battle in which his father was killed (in 811, against khan Krum of Bulgaria). He attempted to hand power over to Theophano, who would have thereby become a new Eirene, but a coup scotched those plans.[31]

We see, then, that Athens retained close links with the capital. It hosted the court in 662–663 and sent fleets, workmen, and brides to Constantinople

[27] Nikephoros, *Short History* 60 (pp. 128–131, with commentary on 211–212); Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle s.a.* 6218 (de Boor v. I, p. 405; Mango and Scott pp. 560–561, with commentary). See Kaegi (1981); for this period, idem (1966).

[28] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle s.a.* 6258 (de Boor v. I, p. 440; Mango and Scott pp. 608–609, with commentary).

[29] Eirene has been rehabilitated as a ruler, if not as a mother, by Treadgold (1988) 5 and c. 2; and Herrin (2001) c. 2, esp. 51–58.

[30] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle s.aa.* 6290–6291 (de Boor v. I, pp. 473–474; Mango and Scott pp. 650–652, with commentary).

[31] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle s.aa.* 6300 and 6303 (de Boor v. I, pp. 483, 492; Mango and Scott pp. 664, 674, with commentaries). For the bride-shows, see Treadgold (2004); for Theophano, Herrin (2001) 149–150.

in the eighth century. The city, indeed all of Attica, was never lost to the empire. Paradoxically, then, the catastrophes of the seventh century made Athens more important to the center of power than it had been when the borders of empire lay along the Danube and the Euphrates. Contraction brought Attica to the fore. But its most important strategic role in the new historical realities may in fact not be mentioned in our sources at all. One of the great mysteries of Byzantine history is how the empire reestablished control over central and western Greece after those lands had, in one way or another, been lost to the Avars and the Slavs. The Slavic presence in Greece is a controversial issue, and it is not clear whether it involved widespread settlement or only a disruption of provincial administration. What is not in dispute is that by the mid ninth century Greece had been brought back under imperial control and almost all the Slavs there had been Christianized and Hellenized, indeed their cultural profile was now indistinguishable from that of the rest of the Roman population (archaeologically it is almost impossible to tell them apart from the indigenous population at all). Yet apart from a few vague statements in the sources, we have no information as to how this major religious, cultural, and political achievement was accomplished.[32] In any case, whether it was organized from Constantinople or came about through peaceful relations between Slavs and Greek-speakers (or both), Athens was ideally situated to promote Christian missions, instruction in the Greek language, and the extension of imperial authority. It was also under Eirene, or at any rate by the mid ninth century, that the Church of Athens was raised to the status of an archbishopric (and later to a metropolis) with suffragan bishops in central Greece, Euboia, and the islands.[33]

Inscriptions of the Christian Parthenon

The Parthenon cult of the Theotokos came to prominence through a combination of factors. It may have become a focal point for local loyalties, as the Athenians realized that they were living in what amounted to a frontier zone; possibly also a beacon of the faith for the Slavic and other tribes of the interior that were just then being evangelized; and it was a religious institution that complemented the presence and activities of imperial administrators in Greece. In this context the Parthenon itself would

[32] For the Slavic issue, see the contributions in Kountoura-Galaki (2001) citing previous bibliography. For different models of Hellenization, see Herrin (1973) and Dunn (1977) 71–86. For the continuity of Byzantine administration in the Peloponnese, see Avraméa (1997).

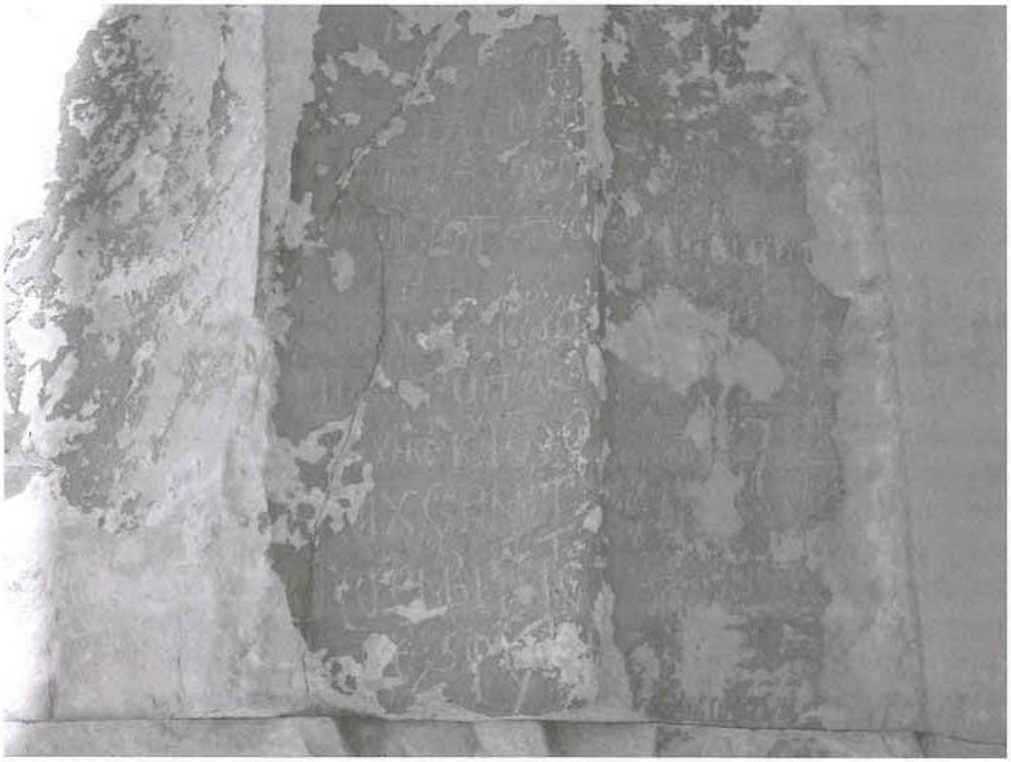
[33] Koder and Hild (1976) 79–81, 127; Pavan (1983) 41.

have become a landmark in a staging-ground for imperial initiatives, military and ecclesiastical. The cult of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike had a similar history, which we glimpse through a set of famous sermons and miracle accounts.[34] We have nothing comparable to this kind of evidence from seventh-century Athens. What we do have is in some ways more interesting. It is not as well known as it should be that the columns of the Parthenon have carved on them over 230 Christian inscriptions, ranging from formal funerary notices to graffiti and doodles (Figs. 13 and 14). These were published in 1973 in an exemplary edition by Anastasios Orlandos (with the help of L. Branouses). In a period when the ancient habit of setting up formal inscriptions had virtually disappeared, it is significant that the Parthenon and other ancient monuments such as the Propylaia and the Hephaisteion overlooking the agora (in Byzantine times a church of St. Georgios) were slowly turning into vast ledgers, recording the names, prayers, dates, and deaths of secular officials, clergy, and pilgrims. (Some eighty additional inscriptions are known from the Propylaia alone, but they have not been fully published; a few more are known from the church of the Erechtheion.) In late antiquity, epitaph inscriptions were set up by both pagans and Christians on the Akropolis. It seems, then, that after roughly 600 they began to be carved directly onto the buildings themselves. This establishes a nice continuity of epigraphical habits from antiquity down to AD 1204.[35]

Though many of the Parthenon inscriptions record precise dates, most cannot be dated exactly, or even within a single century. They begin in ca. 600 and continue down to the fifteenth century, though we should not assume that the earliest precisely dated inscription is also the first one; some may have been carved in the sixth century. Only five are in Latin, from the period of western rule, although the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (the first two centuries of Latin rule) are very sparsely represented. In other words, these inscriptons (and graffiti) were largely a Byzantine habit. Most, 104 to be exact, are prayers, while 64 are epitaphs, and they are important because they cite the names and death-dates of many of Athens' bishops, who might otherwise have remained unknown. The earliest of these episcopal obituaries dates to the sixth or seventh century and has the following form: "On the 7th of April, on Thursday, the 13th indiction, our most holy

[34] Skedros (1999).

[35] For the Theseion (Hephaisteion) inscriptions, see Dinsmoor (1941) 15 n. 31; and Ladas (1952), citing previous editions; for the Propylaia, a new and complete edition has been promised by Avramea and Tanoulas (1989); for the Erechtheion, Lesk (2004) 352–355, 1516–1526. For the epigraphic habit in late antique Attica, see the new edition by Sironen (1997), esp. 167–181 for the Akropolis.

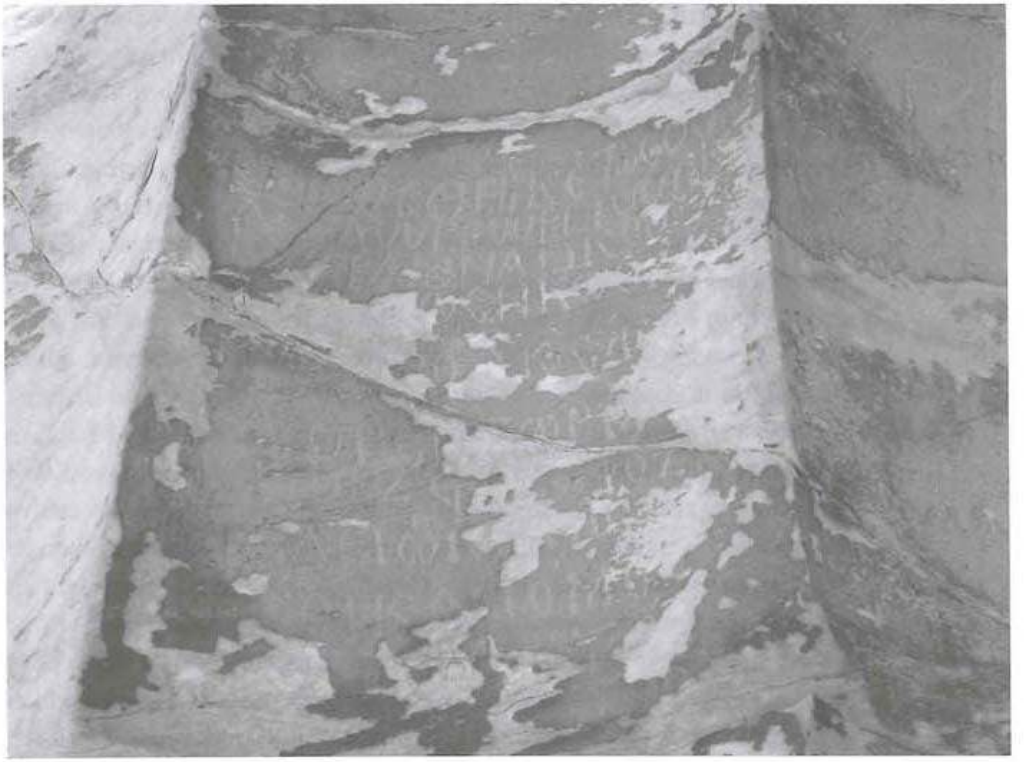


13 Parthenon column inscriptions 57, 58, 61, 62, containing the epitaphs of four bishops of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries (Michael, Ioannes, Philippos, and Niketas).

bishop Ioannes passed away" (indictions were fifteen-year tax-cycles, but unless we know which cycle this was the thirteenth year of, we cannot date Ioannes' obituary to a specific year).[36] After that, most of these epitaphs are also dated to a specific year, based on the Date from the Creation of the world (which for most Byzantines occurred in 5508 BC). Even clergymen of lower rank used this precise system in their Parthenon inscriptions, making the monument one of our main sources of dated Byzantine inscriptions.[37] When we add to this already high figure the number of inscriptions that were carved on parts of the building that were subsequently destroyed; those that were missed by the modern editors (a potentially large number, I am told by those in charge of the Parthenon restoration); and those that were perhaps painted on but that later faded, we can conclude that by 1204 the Parthenon may have contained the prayers, obituaries, and names of many

[36] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 66–67 (no. 74). Basic information and statistics can be found in the introduction. For an English introduction, see Korres (1996a) 136–161, here 147–148.

[37] For a sample, see Mentzou-Meïmare (1977–1979) 81–88.



14 Parthenon column inscriptions 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, containing the epitaphs of priests and a bishop of the eleventh century.

hundreds of locals and visitors, a comparatively enormous number. To these should be added the inscriptions and graffiti on the walls of the Propylaia, made by pilgrims to the Parthenon on their way up to or down from the Akropolis, and those on the Hephaisteion.[38] There is no comparable body of epigraphic material from any building in the Byzantine world, probably not even Hagia Sophia, whose inscriptions and graffiti are also unpublished for the most part.

The prayers carved on the Parthenon are generally addressed on behalf of a named supplicant to God or the Theotokos, treating the columns of the church as a direct and permanent conduit to divine attention. "Remember, Lord, your slave Ioannes the presbyter."[39] In two cases, which cannot be dated, the prayer is directed specifically to the Despoina of Athens, "Our Lady of Athens."[40] We will see in a later chapter that the label "Atheniotissa"

[38] Tanoulas (1997) 284–285; we still lack a modern edition.
[39] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 85 (no. 94).
[40] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 8–9 (nos. 16, 17).

was not formally attached to the Parthenon cult before the twelfth century, but it may have been in popular use long before that.

The plurality of the inscriptions were carved by – or on behalf of – the temple staff, including almost all ecclesiastical offices and titles, from the bishops down to the most humble cantor. Eight of them, dating perhaps from the tenth century, are identified as servants of the "Great Church of Athens," meaning the Parthenon itself, which was the metropolitan church of the see of Athens. The "Great Church" was what the Byzantines called Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which makes this an expression of considerable local pride for the Athenians.[41] One of the inscriptions is in accomplished verse, with an acrostic spelling out the poet's name (Ioannes, again); another uses Homeric vocabulary; while a third is basically a curse, calling upon "Holy Maria" to afflict a rival for his girlfriend's affections (τὸν γαμῶντα τὴν νύμφην μου) with a hernia, and then to make him that man's doctor "so that I may cut his *rhombos*." This is probably not a sexual reference but the bandage worn by hernia patients. Someone else tried to count the columns, but not the four that were incorporated into the later architectural modifications.[42] Thirty-two of the inscriptions are mere names, basically *x was here*. These may have been carved by pilgrims and other visitors. There are also three ship-graffiti, which may symbolize a pilgrimage from across the seas, or else they may have been "votive offerings of sailors."[43] The church of St. Georgios overlooking the agora (the ancient Hephaisteion) features at least twenty-two such figures (though many of them date from much later times).[44]

Unfortunately, there is no comparative study of similar inscriptions and graffiti in Byzantium, so it is difficult to put the Parthenon corpus into perspective. Similar inscriptions have been found at other pilgrimage sites, such as Ephesos. The Holy Land is of course in a class by itself, but in the case of the Parthenon we are talking about a single monument. Clearly we are dealing with a major devotional site; this conclusion we can draw safely from the epigraphic evidence alone, without the benefit of the many narrative texts that add depth to the picture in later centuries. In fact, what happened on the Akropolis during this period does not differ in its essentials from what happened at countless pagan shrines in classical antiquity,

[41] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 15–16.

[42] Acrostic: Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 82–83 (no. 89); Homeric: 120 (no. 153); curse: 5 (no. 9); count: 102 (no. 123) respectively. Cf. the Homeric language of the Skripou inscription (ancient Orchomenos) of 873–874: Papalexandrou (2003) 67; Lauxtermann (2003) 119–120; see also pp. 185–186 below.

[43] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) *27–*28. The quotation is from Meinardus (1970–1971a) 31.

[44] Goudas (1911).

though the habit of carving names and prayers on the Christian Parthenon lasted longer and produced more "text" than did most ancient shrines. But the cultural analysis that has been applied to the latter seems to apply just as well to the former. Future students of these inscriptions might consider whether the standardization of lettering and formulae implies the existence of stonecutters who performed this service for their fellow clergymen and for pilgrims, perhaps in exchange for a fee. The famous statue of Memnon (so-called), near the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, managed to acquire some 100 Greek and Latin inscriptions during the first and second centuries AD, which betray the hand of "professional" cutters. The insistence of the Parthenon inscriptions on personal names also has more in common with ancient habits than with those of Christians in late antiquity.[45]

We will revisit some of these inscriptions after we have considered all the evidence for the cult of the Parthenon in Byzantine times. Why did so many want to carve their names on this church? This is directly related to the question of why the Parthenon became such an important Christian shrine in the first place. A desire to associate one's name permanently with a monument that had demonstrated its capacity to survive major historical and religious changes would certainly have contributed to this practice. There is now some reason to think that monumental inscriptions in Byzantium were read aloud by visitors.

> When activated by an able reader, the memory of Leon Kotzes [an official whose epitaph is carved on one of the Parthenon columns] became synonymous with the visible significance of the surrounding stone structures ... It is difficult to believe that the looming presence of the antique did not contribute something, some vague evocation of past greatness, to those inscribed messages.[46]

The importance of Athens in the Byzantine administration of Greece and the rise of the Parthenon cult are alike reflected in an extraordinary burial on the Akropolis, with which we may fittingly conclude this chapter. In 848, Leon, who held the rank of *protospatharios* and was the general (*strategos*) in command of the province of Hellas, was buried near the Parthenon. The inscribed slab covering his tomb has been found and his epitaph was carved prominently on the column just to the left of the west entrance of the

[45] See the perceptive discussion by Beard (1991). For the Holy Lands, see Eck (1995); for Ephesos, Foss (2002) 138; for Soumela, Meinardus (1970–1971b) 65, 67–68. For Roman Egypt, see Casson (1994) 274–285, and 324–325 for the Holy Lands. For a confession from the second century AD of having carved religious graffiti at the oracle of Ammon in Egypt, see the letter of Nearchos in Mitteis and Wilcken (1912) 147–148 (no. 117): he carved the names of his friends too.

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church.[47] On the basis of this burial, it is believed that Athens rather than Thebes was the provincial capital at that time. On the other hand, the burial and inscription may reflect only Leon's personal devotion to the cult of the Theotokos at Athens, regardless of where he had his headquarters. We will see that in the twelfth century the governors stationed at Thebes made the pilgrimage to the Parthenon, in one case in violation of imperial orders. In fact, it is possible that Leon was buried inside the church itself, as a number of tombs were found beneath the floor of the narthex and inside the north exterior peristyle.[48]

To conclude, even after Justinian's closure of the schools, Athens may have continued to be a center of learning. In the disturbances that followed, it held out as one of the main bastions of imperial power in the southern Balkans, but its role and fame as a university town was yielding to the glory of its temple on the rock. At about the time of Leon's burial, the city's religious standing was overtaking its administrative importance. Athens was about to be identified almost exclusively with the cult of the Theotokos in the Parthenon, which wiped away the stain of ancient paganism. In the minds of many, Athens was about to become the most pious Christian city in the empire where it had once been a city "addicted to idols."

[47] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 127–131 (no. 164).

[48] Korres (1996a) 136–161, here 147 and 159 nn. 54, 55, citing previous bibliography. For another Leon *protospatharios* who, around the same time, built the church of Skripou near Orchomenos and was presumably buried in it, see Papalexandrou (2003) 63–64.

3 | Imperial recognition: Basileios II in Athens (AD 1018)

An emperor in Athens

In 1018, the Byzantine emperor Basileios II visited Athens. But Basileios was no ordinary emperor, and 1018 was no ordinary year for the empire. The church of the Mother of God in Athens was about to be recognized by the most powerful and victorious ruler in the Christian world.

Basileios was born in the purple in 958, during the reign of his grandfather Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos (d. 959). He was crowned two years later, in 960, by his father Romanos II (959–963), so fifty-eight years before he came to Athens. His rights to the throne were set aside, though never denied, for thirteen years by two interlopers, the military emperors Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969) and the latter's nephew and murderer Ioannes I Tzimiskes (969–976). In those years Byzantine armies trounced the empire's enemies and expanded the borders in Mesopotamia and toward the Danube. But when Basileios came to the throne at 18 – with his brother Konstantinos VIII, who always remained in his shadow – he reigned rather than ruled, as he was under the thumb of court politicians. Moreover, he was threatened by the military families, who had come to regard the throne as a prize for their valor. It was not until 985 that Basileios rid himself of his eunuch handlers, and the rebels were not finally put down until 989, with the aid of soldiers sent by a brother-in-law, Vladimir of Kiev, who converted to marry Basileios' sister Anna. These soldiers became the Varangian unit of Rus' and Scandinavian mercenaries. Basileios thereafter ruled according to his own mind, allowing no one to become too great, promoting talent over birth, spending years on campaign with his armies, hoarding massive amounts of coin in his vaults, and never marrying. He would rule in this fashion, the most powerful monarch in the Christian world and Near East, for another thirty-six years, until his death in 1025. His was the longest reign of any Roman emperor.

Basileios led many campaigns against the empire's neighbors in the East, but the foe that occupied most of his attention was Byzantium's long-standing enemy to the north: the Bulgarians. Under tsar Samuel, their

state had recovered from the defeats of the 960s and 970s and began to aggressively raid Byzantine territory in Makedonia and Greece, as far south as the Gulf of Corinth. Basileios and his generals fought against Samuel and his boyars for some thirty years. The dramatic ending of this struggle has led many historians to conclude that the intention from the start was to conquer Bulgaria once and for all, that the annual battles and skirmishes mentioned in our sources were part of an overall strategy for total victory. But that assumption has been questioned. It has been proposed that Basileios intended only to hold the Bulgarians at bay and that this so-called total war was in fact punctuated by fairly long periods of truce during which the emperor gave every indication of recognizing the legitimacy of his enemy. It was not until the battle of Kleidion in 1014, when the Bulgarians suffered a massive defeat, that the terms of the conflict changed. This defeat, it was said, caused tsar Samuel to die of grief. Later Byzantine tradition even held that Basileios captured 15,000 Bulgarian soldiers, blinded them all, and sent them back to their master, each hundred being led by a one-eyed man. This atrocity, exaggerated and possibly invented, was later linked to the nickname of *Boulgaroktonos*, or the "Bulgar-Slayer."[1] After Samuel's death, Bulgarian leadership fell apart, until finally all of his would-be heirs and successors had either died or surrendered. In 1018, Basileios found himself in possession of the whole of the Balkans, as far north as the Danube and as far west as Serbia. And the first thing that he did was go to Athens.

The historian Ioannes Skylitzes, writing toward the end of the eleventh century, tells us that Athens was the destination of Basileios' tour of Greece. The emperor marched south past Thessaly to Zetounion (modern Lamia), where he gazed upon the bones of the Bulgarians killed when his general Nikephoros Ouranos had routed Samuel in 997, and then on to Thermopylai, where he saw the wall called Skelos that had been built by a certain Roupenios to hold back Bulgarian raids.[2] The pace of this march was apparently leisurely, with time to admire the sites associated with the past generation of warfare. The emperor would then have marched through Boiotia, whose capital was Thebes, and then on to Attica, entering Athens from the north between Mts. Parnes and Pentelikon. The purpose of the visit, we are told, was religious: "after reaching Athens and giving thanks for his victory to the Mother of God, adorning the temple with magnificent and expensive dedications, he returned to Constantinople,"[3] still by land, arriving in 1019. He entered the City

[1] See now Stephenson (2003); for the reign and its historian (Ioannes Skylitzes), see Holmes (2005).

[2] For Byzantine Zetounion and Thermopylai, see Koder and Hild (1976) 283–284 and 273–275.

[3] Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories: Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII* 43 (p. 364). For Basileios' triumph in Constantinople, see McCormick (1986) 178.

through the Golden Gate and held a triumphal parade that featured Samuel's daughters as well as other members of the Bulgarian royal family. This procession culminated in the Great Church, i.e., Hagia Sophia, where the 60-year-old emperor, crowned by victory and glory, sang hymns to God before retiring to his palace.

An additional stop in the emperor's itinerary is known to us from a note added to Skylitzes' text in the twelfth century by Michael, bishop of Diabolis (Devol, south of Ochrid). Michael had independent, detailed, and, it appears, reliable knowledge of the events. He adds that Basileios stopped at Thessalonike on the way back from Athens where he investigated and put down a conspiracy. Michael says nothing regarding any celebrations there to parallel those in Athens and the capital. Of course, we should not expect that these authors are giving us a complete record of everything the emperor did, but the thank-offerings, hymns, gifts, and processions that took place in Athens and Constantinople were notable enough to be remembered. Nothing comparable seems to have taken place in Thessalonike, though it is difficult to imagine an emperor spending time in that city without attending services at the church of St. Demetrios.[4]

It is a pity that we do not have more information about Basileios' stay in Athens.[5] It is unlikely that he took his armies with him, but it is also improbable that he traveled without a guard. The armies probably remained in the northern Balkans, where they could more easily be provisioned and could watch over the recently annexed territories, while the emperor was accompanied by officers and his elite unit of Varangians. It is possible that it was one of Basileios' Varangians who carved, during the visit to Athens of 1018, a long and long-since illegible runic inscription on both sides of the giant lion statue (about 3 m tall) that used to stand by the entrance to the Peiraieus harbor (Fig. 15). This statue was carried off in 1688 by Francesco Morosini, the Venetian admiral and adventurer who bombed and exploded the Parthenon during his siege of Athens. The Lion of Peiraieus still guards the Arsenal of Venice.[6] Can the inscription be associated with Basileios' visit? The Varangians tended to travel with the emperor, and no other emperor traveled to Athens during the period of the Guard's existence (988–1204). We have to admit, however, that this connection is weak. The inscription could have been carved by any Northman who happened to

[4] Michael's notes are printed in smaller font in Thurn's edn. of Skylitzes. In general, see Ferluga (1967) 167; Holmes (2005) 76. For Basileios and St. Demetrios, see below.

[5] For a romantic and "Hellenist" reconstruction, see Schlumberger (1900) 398–410. See below for this interpretation.

[6] For Morosini and the antiquities of Athens, see Sacconi (1991); Chatziaslani (1996).

15 Lion of the Peiraieus (now in Venice), drawn when the runes were more legible by F. Lindström (taken from K. Gjerset, *History of the Norwegian People*, New York 1915).

arrive at the Peiraieus, either a pilgrim on his way to the East or by an off-duty or on-assignment guardsman.[7] The inscription can no longer be deciphered, though "it would have been interesting to know what a Swedish Viking wished to confide to a Greek lion."[8]

Byzantine emperors never traveled without a retinue, but we cannot be sure who else accompanied Basileios on this detour through Greece, which

[7] For the Guard in general, see Blöndal (1978), esp. 230–233 for the inscription. For the possible link with Basileios' visit, see Schlumberger (1900) 408. The historian Michael Attaleiates says that Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081) dismissed many Varangians "to far-away fortresses" after a mutiny: *History* 296 (p. 212). For Varangians wintering dispersed in the provinces without the emperor, see Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*: *Michael IV* 4 (p. 394). For other runic inscriptions in Byzantium, see Ciggaar (1974) 313–314, as well as the Hagia Sophia inscription.

[8] Quoted in Jones (1984) 267–268.

the Byzantines called "the lower regions" of the empire (*ta katôtika*). In the mid tenth century, Basileios' grandfather, the scholar-emperor Konstantinos VII, compiled a treatise that listed exactly the protocols regarding imperial expeditions. But it is highly unlikely that Basileios, a ruler of ascetic habits, dragged such a vast baggage-train around with him as is specified here, including a butler and staff, the palace plate, special wines and delicacies, folding benches and thicker rugs, in sum twenty pages' worth of provisions (wardrobes, books, medicine, etc.), "so that nothing at all is lacking in the imperial service."[9] These instructions were almost designed to ensure that emperors never left the capital. But Basileios in particular, we are told by the historian Michael Psellos (born late in that emperor's reign), was a frugal ruler who did not indulge in the luxuries of the palace even when he was in the capital, nor did he ease the hardships of campaigning for himself.[10] So in 1018 Athens was probably spared a visit by the entire palace staff.

The bishop at the time of Basileios' visit may have been a certain Michael. His epitaph is carved on one of the Parthenon columns and dated to 1030 (see Fig. 13): "Our most saintly metropolitan Michael passed away on the 13th of the month of August, in the 13th indiction, of the year 6538." We also possess a stamp made by his seal, which features the Theotokos on one side and his name and office on the other. He is attested in office only after 1027, so it is conceivable that another man was bishop of Athens nine years earlier, during Basileios' visit.[11] Unfortunately, we know nothing of the thousands of others who witnessed the ceremonies in Athens and attended upon the emperor and his heavenly protectoress. Nor can we be sure what exactly Basileios dedicated in her church. We should not rush to identify his gifts with the few objects and adornments that we happen to know from the other literary and archaeological sources regarding the furnishings of the Parthenon (to be discussed below). Possibly what he gave came from the spoils of the recent war. At any rate, his gifts would have conformed to tradition. For example, in the early ninth century the chronicler Theophanes praised the emperor Michael I (811–813) for making Christmas gifts of gold to the patriarch of Constantinople and the clergy and for "sumptuously adorning the holy sanctuary, giving golden vessels set with stones and a set of four curtains of ancient manufacture,

[9] Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, *Treatise on Military Expeditions* (pp. 94–151, esp. 102–105). For a summary, see Dimitroukas (1997) v. I, 271–275.

[10] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 1.4, 1.32. In this work Psellos is doing more than recording history: Kaldellis (1999b) esp. c. 6 for Basileios' asceticism.

[11] Epitaph: Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 44 (no. 57). Seal: Laurent (1963) 445 (no. 596). For a list of known bishops with their dates, see Fedalto (1988) 489–493.

splendidly embroidered in gold and purple and decorated with wonderful sacred images."[12]

Before attempting to explain why the emperor went to Athens in the first place – an unexpected choice far from strategic areas – we should consider one more possible piece of evidence relating to his visit there. It has been suggested that the so-called Gunther tapestry depicts Basileios' triumphal entries into Athens and Constantinople in 1018–1019. Made of silk and currently in Bamberg, it depicts an emperor on a white horse receiving crowns from two flanking female figures that, according to Roman convention, represent the *tychai* (personified fortunes) of two cities. According to the prevalent history of this tapestry, it was sent as a gift by the emperor Konstantinos IX Monomachos to the western emperor Heinrich IV, but was instead used as a shroud for the latter's envoy, the archbishop Gunther of Bamberg, who died on the return journey. It was once proposed by A. Grabar that this hanging depicts Basileios at Athens and Constantinople, but alternative theories have since been proposed and there does not appear to be any easy way to decide among them. For instance, the tapestry may represent Ioannes Tzimiskes' triumph of 971 over the Rus' and Bulgarians, or two cities captured and renamed by him in that war (Preslav-Ioannoupolis and Dorostolon-Theodoroupolis), or two cities captured by Nikephoros II Phokas in 965 (Tarsos and Mospouestia).[13] The identification of the figures with Athens and Constantinople now seems to be unlikely, as cities offering crowns in this way were understood to have been captured by the emperor, and Constantinople would not have been shown in a way that made it seem equal to Athens. The link between the Gunther tapestry and Athens seems, then, to have been broken.

Interpreting imperial pilgrimage

So why did Basileios go to Athens? We must first recognize how unusual his action was. As far as know, no emperor had visited Athens since Konstas II in the seventh century. That emperor's stay there during the winter of 662–663, as opposed to, say, Corinth, was perhaps significant for the emergence

[12] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia s.a.* 6304 (de Boor v. I, p. 494; Mango and Scott p. 678).

[13] For the original identification, see Grabar (1968); tentatively accepted by Beckwith (1961) 98–100 and Muthesius (1992) 240–242. For Tzimiskes, see Prinzing (1993), though the figures cannot represent the *demoi*; Stephenson (2001) 57–63 and (2003) 62–65. For Phokas, see Papamastorakis (2003a), who offers the strongest arguments, including a new theory as to how it arrived in the West.

of Athens as a regional center, but Konstas was only in those parts to begin with because he was taking a fleet to Italy. For later emperors, Athens was too far and out of the way, and not on the way *to* anything. It was too expensive to move and maintain a proper imperial retinue there for any length of time.

The palace-based emperors of late antiquity (395–610) rarely left the capital. When they did so for religious reasons, they usually did not go far. Leon I (457–474) would visit Daniel the stylite at Anaplous on the Bosporos.[14] In 563, Justinian, at the time over 80 years old, went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Germia or Myriangeloi ("Ten Thousand Angels") in Galatia (central Asia Minor), to fulfill a vow.[15] That was an extraordinarily long journey for an emperor of that period. In the middle period (610–1204), many emperors were active military commanders, whose wars often took them beyond the borders of the state. The few stay-at-home emperors rarely left the vicinity of Constantinople. It was said that Leon VI (886–912), Basileios' great-grandfather, had visited Mt. Olympos in Bithynia, which in this period was a famous and revered monastic center, to pray for a son and heir. That son, Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, crossed the Sea of Marmara and in his turn climbed Mt. Olympos to be with the monks before he died (959).[16] But many emperors of this period were campaigners and so visited many famous shrines and churches. For example, in 795, Konstantinos VI visited Ephesos after an engagement with Arab raiders. He prayed at the church of St. John and granted a substantial tax-break to the local fair.[17] In 1176, Manuel I Komnenos visited the popular shrine of the Archangel Michael at Chonai in Asia Minor (ancient Kolossai) en route to his disastrous battle with the Turks at Myriokephalon.[18]

These visits, then, were either to locations near the capital or did not involve a great detour from the route the army was following anyway. And pilgrimage could be combined with military operations. For instance, soon after the end of the civil wars, in 989, Basileios II himself had visited Thessalonike "in order to honor the famous martyr," i.e., St. Demetrios, the patron-saint of the city. But our source (Ioannes Skylitzes again) goes on to tell us that Basileios installed a force in the city to prevent raids by

[14] *The Life of St. Daniel the Stylite* 44, 48–49, 51, 54, 55, 57, 63, 65.

[15] Ioannes Malalas, *Chronographia* 18.148. For the shrine, see Mango (1986b).

[16] Theophanes Continuatus, *Book VI: Konstantinos VII* 49–50 (pp. 463–466). See Foss (2002) 137.

[17] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia s.a.* 6287 (de Boor v. I, pp. 469–470; Mango and Scott pp. 645–646, with commentary). See also Foss (2002) 145.

[18] Niketas Choniates, *History* 178. For Chonai in this period, see Magdalino (1993) 129–132.

Samuel.[19] We are told nothing comparable regarding his visit to Athens in 1018, nor is it easy to imagine what strategic importance Athens could have had, especially given that the Bulgarian state had been annihilated and there were no other threats to Greece. Athens was far from Basileios' bases of operations in the northern Balkans and could be reached only by a long march that would have to be retraced. So why go to Athens?

European historians of the nineteenth century who wrote about Basileios' visit to Athens, such as G. Finlay (in English), F. Gregorovius (in German), and G. Schlumberger (in French), had tried to imagine what the medieval emperor thought of the ruins he saw about him, what it meant to him that the temple in which he paid his devotions had been built by Perikles, almost fifteen hundred years ago, to house the statue of Athena. In this respect, they were projecting onto the Byzantine emperor what they themselves would have thought and felt under those circumstances, making Basileios' march to Attica into a romantic rediscovery of Hellenism.[20] There is of course an element of anachronism here: Basileios did not travel to Athens to commune with the Hellenic past or because he believed that Athens was a national center. Even though, as we will see, the Byzantine adoration of the Parthenon was not free of Hellenist undertones, these were very different from those of modern historians.

More recently and pragmatically, another historian has suggested that Basileios sought "popular support in Constantinople and other major cities like Athens."[21] But this explanation is too vague. It is unlikely that Athens would ever have sided with the Bulgarians, and that possibility was moot now anyway. There is also no reason to believe that Basileios was afraid of internal rebellion, as he was in Thessalonike for instance. Southern Greece was one of the few places in the empire that had not produced rebels for centuries; there were hardly any armies there at the time anyway. To be sure, his presence at a major celebration in Greece demonstrated the security of his rule and advertised the victory over the Bulgarians. It would have reassured his subjects and made him more popular. But it does not explain why Basileios went in person – he could have sent a general to represent him, as emperors often did – and it does not explain why his itinerary, of which we have a detailed account, focused on Athens and not on Thebes or Corinth, which were in other ways more important cities for the middle

[19] Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories: Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII* 20 (p. 339).

[20] Especially Schlumberger (1900) 398–410; for the others, see Stephenson (2003) 106–109.

[21] Stephenson (2000) 76; also Pavan (1983) 44.

Byzantine economy and administration of southern Greece (Thebes was the provincial capital).[22] We have to consider less political motives.

In fact, we do not have to look far. Skylitzes tells us that Basileios traveled to Athens for no other reason than to thank the Mother of God in her temple for his victories. The reason for the detour was religious, or imperial-religious, and furthered the rise of Athens' fame as a center for the adoration of the Theotokos. Basileios would not have traveled so far out of his way unless he believed that the Parthenon was among the most important religious sites in his western provinces, if not *the* most important one. At the same time, his visit would have reinforced that belief in others, increasing the shrine's popularity. As we will see in the next chapter, Basileios was not the first to go out of his way to worship at the Parthenon (and this not merely among Byzantines), and, moreover, his visit inaugurated and perhaps promoted a steep rise in its popularity that reached its apogee in the twelfth century. We should note that Skylitzes, writing in the later eleventh century, does not specify which temple Basileios visited in Athens; he just says "the temple," assuming that his largely Constantinopolitan audience would automatically understand that he meant the Parthenon. Basileios, then, traveled to Athens for the Parthenon. The temple of the Theotokos in Athens and the Great Church of God in Constantinople dominated his conception of the religious landscape of the empire, at least its western provinces. And he had a long history of pious association with the Mother of God. When he faced the last of the great rebels, Bardas Phokas, on a battlefield near Abydos in 989, Basileios "rode out in front of his own army, and took his stand there with sword in hand. With his left hand he held the icon of the Mother of the Word close to his chest, making it his surest defense against the wild charge of his enemy."[23]

In this sense, at least, Basileios was the Byzantine whose view of the Parthenon corresponded the most to that of the ancient Athenians who had built it originally (though he probably could not have known that): he used it as a monument for the celebration of a military victory over barbarians. However odd it may sound to modern ears, for him as well as for many other Byzantines the Theotokos was primarily a military figure,[24] just as had been Athena, her predecessor in the temple. But at Athens it took the visit of an emperor in the flush of victory to bring forth the Theotokos' martial

[22] For these cities, see Louvi-Kizi (2002) and Sanders (2002).

[23] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 1.4, 1.32; for this passage, see Kaldellis (1999b) c. 7.

[24] See Pentcheva (2006). For the Parthenon as a military monument, see p. 14 above.

attributes, which would otherwise have been more subdued in this provincial and probably by now demilitarized center.

In Basileios' eyes, moreover, Athens was *the* city of the Theotokos; at Constantinople he prayed simply to "God." This seems odd, because the city that chiefly enjoyed the favor and special protection of the Theotokos in Byzantine eyes was normally the capital. Ever since the Avar siege of the City in 626, when the patriarch Sergios paraded her icon along the walls and the people prayed to her for deliverance, Constantinople was regarded as consecrated to the Mother of God. There were more churches dedicated to her there than to any other figure and more than in any other city.[25] The most venerable hymn of Orthodoxy, the Akathistos, is in honor of the Theotokos and is traditionally linked to her saving of the City in 626. It is popularly attributed to none other than Romanos, though recent studies have dated it to the fifth century.[26] Its *prooimion*, however, which ascribes victory and gives thanks to the Theotokos on the City's behalf, may well have been added in 626, perhaps by Sergios. It is here that Basileios' pilgrimage to Athens takes an interesting turn in Skylitzes' account.

Johannes Koder has perceptively noted that when Skylitzes describes the honors that Basileios gave to the Theotokos at Athens he alludes distinctly to the first verses of the Akathistos (compare τῇ θεοτόκῳ τὰ τῆς νίκης εὐχαριστήρια δοὺς with τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ τὰ νικητήρια ὡς λυτρωθεῖσα τῶν δεινῶν εὐχαριστήρια ἀναγράφω σοι ἡ πόλις σου, θεοτόκε).[27] Perhaps when Skylitzes or his source came to the point in his narrative where he had to describe a thank-offering to the Theotokos for an important victory, his mind naturally found the words of a hymn he had doubtless heard many times and probably knew by heart (as many Byzantines did and Greeks today).[28] But regardless of whether the allusion was conscious or not, it implied an amazing transformation in the position of Athens in the Orthodox view of the world: the city that many Christians had cursed for being the home of pagan gods and philosophers was now fit to receive the most exalted praise, which had so far been reserved for Constantinople. As a western visitor to the imperial capital put it in the late eleventh century, "here she is more loved and honored than in any other

[25] For the rise of her cult, see Cameron (1978) and (1981); Limberis (1994). For sources, see Fenster (1968) 100–104. For the churches, see Janin (1969) 156–244 (over 130 are listed, from all periods).

[26] Limberis (1994) 89–97.

[27] Koder (2000) 111–112. The allusion was already noted by the national Greek poet Kostis Palamas in his epic account of Basileios' visit to Athens: *Ἡ φλογέρα τοῦ βασιλιά* 9.181.

[28] Cf. Niketas Choniates, *History* 19, for an allusion to the Hymn in the account of Ioannes II Komnenos' triumph.

place in the world. It is said and believed that this is the most special and proper city of the Mother of God."[29] He may have come to a different or more nuanced conclusion had he traveled more in the provinces and been less awed by the sights of Constantinople. Athens, or rather the temple of the Parthenos on the Akropolis, was being recognized by some as the preeminent shrine of the Theotokos, momentarily equal or perhaps even greater to Constantinople as a place sacred to her.

There is, moreover, an irony in the allusion that escaped the notice of Dr. Koder. In the Salutations of the Theotokos, the Akathistos contains a set of very scornful anti-Athenian verses, which I quoted in the Introduction. No text, then, was more appropriate to signal the total rehabilitation of Athens in 1018 than the Akathistos, yet none brought out better, by being invoked in this context and manner, the deep contradictions that rent the image and the memory of Athens in Byzantium. The harder the Byzantines tried to purify Athens by using Christian imagery and symbolism, the more they drew attention to that which they were trying to dispel and exorcise. In praising the temple of the Mother of God in Athens, they exposed the problematic nature of the place and the uniqueness of the building itself. It was never just *any* church, no matter how hard they tried to pretend it was.

Konstas and Basileios may have been the only Byzantine emperors who visited Athens, but they were not the last emperors of Constantinople to do so. In 1209 Henri, the Latin emperor of Constantinople (1206–1216), traveled south to secure his Greek dominions. Among other places, he stopped at Athens, where he spent two days enjoying the hospitality of Othon de la Roche, the city's new lord, and praying in the "eglyse c'on dist de Nostre Dame." We are told this by Henri de Valenciennes, a contemporary who wrote the history of the reign.[30] Henri's visit ushered in a new era of continued fame and prestige for the Parthenon, which it would enjoy henceforth as a cathedral of Notre Dame among the Latin masters of Romania and their backers in the West. That is a story for another time. What is worth pointing out in conclusion is that, while Henri must have prayed in many churches on his travels, only his visit to the church at Athens received any special notice from his historian.

[29] *Anonymous Tarragonensis*, cited in Ciggaar (1995) 128.

[30] Henri de Valenciennes, *Histoire de l'empereur Henri de Constantinople* 681 (p. 115). For Athens after 1205 in general, see Lock (1995) 86–88.

4 | Pilgrims of the middle period (AD 900–1100)

Murder in the Parthenon

Basileios' pilgrimage to the Parthenon confirmed rather than established the importance of the church as a Christian shrine. Imperial recognition boosted its prestige and made it an even more attractive destination for less exalted pilgrims, but the Parthenon already was a popular destination. Basileios' action validated widespread beliefs and practices. In this chapter, I will present the evidence for pilgrimage to Athens in the years 900–1100, in other words for the two centuries on either side of Basileios. Our sources are mostly hagiographical. As no saint spent much time in Athens, it is by chance that we have references to that city, but they tell us enough to establish that it was a major religious center, virtually a *de rigueur* stop for anyone traveling through Greece. Actually, all it takes to establish this is one source casually assuming that Athens was a major site, and we have more than one source. Strictly speaking, individual texts offer evidence for only a single group of pilgrims visiting the city, but the assumptions about its importance that underlie a narrative point to broader perceptions and practices; moreover, if an individual visit seems to conform to a wider pattern of travel, we may legitimately imagine a steady stream of visitors that left only fleeting marks on the surviving record. We must squeeze the sources for all that they are worth, looking at what they take for granted in talking about Athens as well as at what they explictly state.

In addition to provincial hagiographic sources, we also have evidence for the fame of the Parthenon in Constantinople and in the eastern provinces of the empire, which I will present in the next chapter. As we saw, the first reported pilgrim was Stephanos of Sougdaia, who had apparently heard of the Parthenon in distant Kappadokia already in the early eighth century. But before looking at the saints' lives, let us turn to a violent episode reported in Constantinopolitan sources, which occurred at the beginning of the period under discussion and has been linked to a putative phase of strong Arab presence in Athens.

Various chronicles of the tenth century report that the inhabitants of Greece and Athens rose up against a certain Khasé (Χασέ), the son of

Ioubes, because of his avarice and profligacy. The sources say that they stoned him to death "in the sanctuary (*thysiastêrion*) of the temple in Athens."[1] We notice again, as in Skylitzes' report about Basileios' visit to Athens, that it was not necessary to specify to a Constantinopolitan audience which temple exactly "the one in Athens" was; *the* temple was understood to be the Parthenon.

Given the placement of this episode in the (mostly) annalistic format of the chronicles, we can date Khasé's death to 914. He had been appointed governor of the province of Hellas by the emperor Alexandros (912–913) and was killed the following year.[2] We learn some additional facts about Khasé from Alexandros' nephew, the scholar-emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, who, around the mid tenth century, prepared a treatise on the empire's foreign policy for his son Romanos II. This odd miscellany, many of whose problems remain unsolved, goes today by the name *De Administrando Imperio*. In a chapter that begins by talking about the Slavs of the Peloponnesos but then turns into a hotchpotch of information about various administrative reappointments in the frontier provinces, Konstantinos VII (or his research assistants) note that the emperor Alexandros overturned all of his late brother Leon VI's appointments, in part because he was under the influence of Khasé, "who was of the race of the Saracens and truly still a Saracen in his mind and manner and religion, and a slave of the *patrikios* Damianos" (a title at the Byzantine court). Khasé secured a prestigious provincial appointment in Asia Minor for his brother Niketas, but nothing is said in this text of his own appointment to the province of Greece.[3]

What we are dealing with here are brothers of "Saracen" origin who had taken up service under the Byzantine nobility and quickly risen to prominence at the court. This was a fairly common story in Byzantium, a civilization that had the ability to absorb and assimilate all manner of foreigners. Normally, such social mobility required that first-generation arrivals convert to Orthodoxy, learn Greek, and conform to Byzantine customs. Khasé was apparently one of the few exceptions to this rule, unless Konstantinos VII is trying here to further blacken the reputation

[1] Theophanes Continuatus, *Book 6: Konstantinos* VII 9 (p. 388). It is reported identically in all chronicles of this tradition: pseudo-Symeon Magister, *Konstantinos VII* 9 (p. 723); Georgios Monachos Continuatus, *Konstantinos VII* 14 (p. 880); and Leon Grammatikos, *Chronographia* (p. 294). For the tangled relationship among these texts, see Karpozilos (2002) c. 4.

[2] Jenkins (1962) 193; for the context, see Runciman (1929) 53.

[3] Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 50.202–209 (pp. 242–243). For some of the problems of this text, see Lounghis (1990).

of his uncle Alexandros, by depicting his advisors as outsiders. Alexandros is generally portrayed very negatively in tenth-century Byzantine sources, and Konstantinos' writings were no exception. As emperor, Alexandros had attacked the memory and legacy of his brother, Konstantinos' beloved father Leon VI. Depicting him as unduly influenced by a Muslim Saracen would make him look worse.[4] In other words, Khasé's customs and faith might not have been as foreign as Konstantinos would have us believe. In such matters, there was always room for distortion and polemic: one emperor's loyal and converted advisor was another's sinister foreigner. The "slave" of Damianos might have merely been a man in his retinue, and so on. That Khasé was at least outwardly (and perhaps truly) a Christian is indicated by Konstantinos' qualification that he was "truly (τῷ ὄντι)" a Saracen in faith – "truly," that is, as opposed to what he appeared to be, namely a Christian.

Besides, it is unlikely that a Byzantine emperor would appoint a Muslim as a provincial governor. He would have little authority over the provincials, who, besides, stoned him because of his avarice, not religion. In fact, the scene of his murder, the altar of "the temple," implies that he had sought sanctuary there against his assailants, which implies that he was a Christian. On the other hand, a Muslim could conceivably have done that hoping to be spared by his Christian enemies. Decades ago, scholars linked the death of Khasé to an alleged period of Arab rule over Athens. Arabs did hold the island of Crete from the 820s to 961 and raided throughout the Aegean during that time. Perhaps they established a brief dominion over Athens. But this theory has rightly been rejected. There is no evidence that the Byzantines ever lost Athens – such an event would likely have been mentioned in the chronicles, which did not flinch from recording Byzantine defeats. Khasé must be seen as an (unpopular) agent of the Byzantine provincial administration.[5] Having said that, however, Arabic inscriptions from roughly AD 1000 (give or take a couple of centuries) refer to a mosque in the city at that time, so we should not rule out the possibility of an Arab presence, perhaps linked to trade.[6] After all, the Orthodox emperors in Constantinople allowed mosques to operate in their capital and there is

[4] In general, see Karlin-Hayter (1969); for assimilation to Byzantine society, Kaldellis (2007a) c. 2.

[5] Arab rule over Athens: Kampouroglous (1934), who weaves detailed histories out of vague folk poems (that deal in fact with the Ottoman period), or even out of the silence of the sources (172–174 on Khasé). Kampouroglous believed that the stoning took place in the Megale Panagia, the church built in the area of Hadrian's library, but this is rightly rejected by Tanoulas (1997) 19 and 32 n. 69. Arabs in the Aegean: Setton (1975a) II; Christides (1981).

[6] Miles (1956). This does not imply Arab rule over the city: G. Soteriou in Kampouroglous (1934) 176–177; Setton (1975a) II 314–319.

evidence that the Byzantines enjoyed good relations with their Muslim neighbors. When the warriors of the Fourth Crusade arrived before Constantinople in 1203 and, inflamed with holy zeal, attacked one of these mosques, the locals rallied to the victims' defense.[7]

One more thing remains to be said about the Khasé affair, namely that it can remind classically educated readers of the affair of the Olympic victor Kylon, who seized the Akropolis in an effort to become tyrant of Athens in the seventh century BC. The coup failed, and Kylon and his supporters were besieged by the Athenians. According to Herodotos, they sought sanctuary by the cult statue of Athena, but were killed anyway. According to Thucydides, Kylon himself and his brother escaped while his supporters sought sanctuary by "the altar (*bômos*), the one on the Akropolis," before their murder by the Athenians. This was the source of the curse that lay on the Alkmaionid family for centuries (the family of Perikles). Though separated by sixteen hundred years, the Kylonians and Khasé were murdered at the same place under similar circumstances, seeking sanctuary at the "altar" of the temple on the Akropolis. This was, of course, a coincidence, but at least one modern historian of medieval Athens noticed it. Perhaps some of the event's contemporaries also made the connection.[8]

Scholars are now realizing that Byzantine historians were so familiar with classical texts that they were, if anything, over-sensitized to parallels between events in their own times and their ancient "counterparts." In a small number of cases, this led to distortion, that is, the desire to imitate the classics led Byzantine historians to alter the facts of contemporary history in order to make them match events in ancient history. But this was rare. Mostly, it was the tone, vocabulary, rhetoric, and narrative style of reporting that alluded to the ancient model, and allowed the reader to draw conclusions from the comparison. The chroniclers of the tenth century (our sources for the Khasé affair) were not innocent of this practice.[9] Herodotos and Thucydides were among the authors whom any Byzantine historian would have studied, so it is possible that they noticed the connection with Kylon. Moreover, it is likely that the brief notice that we have about Khasé has been excerpted and condensed in the extant chronicles, and that originally, in whatever source the story was first told, it was narrated at greater length and with more detail and context. That original version may have alluded more strongly to the Kylonian affair than does the

[7] Mosques in Constantinople: Reinert (1998) 125–150. Crusade: Niketas Choniates, *History* 553–554.

[8] Herodotos, *Histories* 5.71; Thucydides, *History* 1.126. Noted by Gregorovius (1904) v. I, 226.

[9] In general, see Kaldellis (2004) c. 1. For the tenth century (much work remains to be done), see Jenkins (1948) and (1954); Anagnostakis (1989).

brief summary we now have. Of course, this is based on conjecture, but if true we would then have another instance of how the Christian Parthenon was entangled with its own ancient associations. When we turn to explain the unexpected popularity of the cult of the Athenian Mother of God, we will likewise see that the Parthenon was never ideologically purified of its classical past. It carried with it a set of associations that always colored the way it was perceived, used in worship, and adored.

We can turn now to those who prayed to the Theotokos of Athens under less dire circumstances than did the late Khasé, the son of Ioubes.

Loukas of Steiris

Loukas was one of the most important saints of Byzantine Greece and his long *vita* (written toward the end of the tenth century) is full of information about life at that time. His grandparents had lived originally on Aigina, but in the mid ninth century that island's inhabitants were forced by the Arab raiders of Crete to relocate to Athens, Thebes, and the Peloponnesos. Loukas' family fled to Phokis, on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth. The future saint was born toward the end of the ninth century and showed an early proclivity for the ascetic life. For most of his life he moved from place to place in southern Greece, practicing extreme renunciation. Before his death in 953, he finally settled at Steiris in Phokis where he founded a community around which the monastery of Hosios Loukas was soon built. The complex is one of the most beautiful and famous monuments of the Byzantine period.

Here we are interested in an episode from Loukas' youth. After his father Stephanos died, he tried fleeing from his home on a number of occasions in order to became a monk. The first time he went to Thessaly, where he was arrested and almost sold into slavery by some soldiers. The second time, about exactly when Khasé was appointed governor of Greece, he joined some monks who were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Rome, lying to them in order to conceal his family ties and obligations.

> Leaving the village secretly with him, they all departed for Athens. There they entered the holy church of the Mother of God, and after praying they left him in the monastery where they were staying, entrusting him to the abbot after exacting a pledge that he would soon be tonsured and elected to the most splendid company of the brothers. Then they continued the journey on which they had originally embarked.[10]

[10] *Life of Loukas of Steiris* 9 (pp. 18–19).

But Loukas' mother Euphrosyne was so worried that she prayed constantly for the return of her son. God accordingly sent dreams to the abbot of the monastery in Athens, who interrogated the young brother and found out the truth. Loukas reluctantly left the monastery and returned to Phokis and his mother.

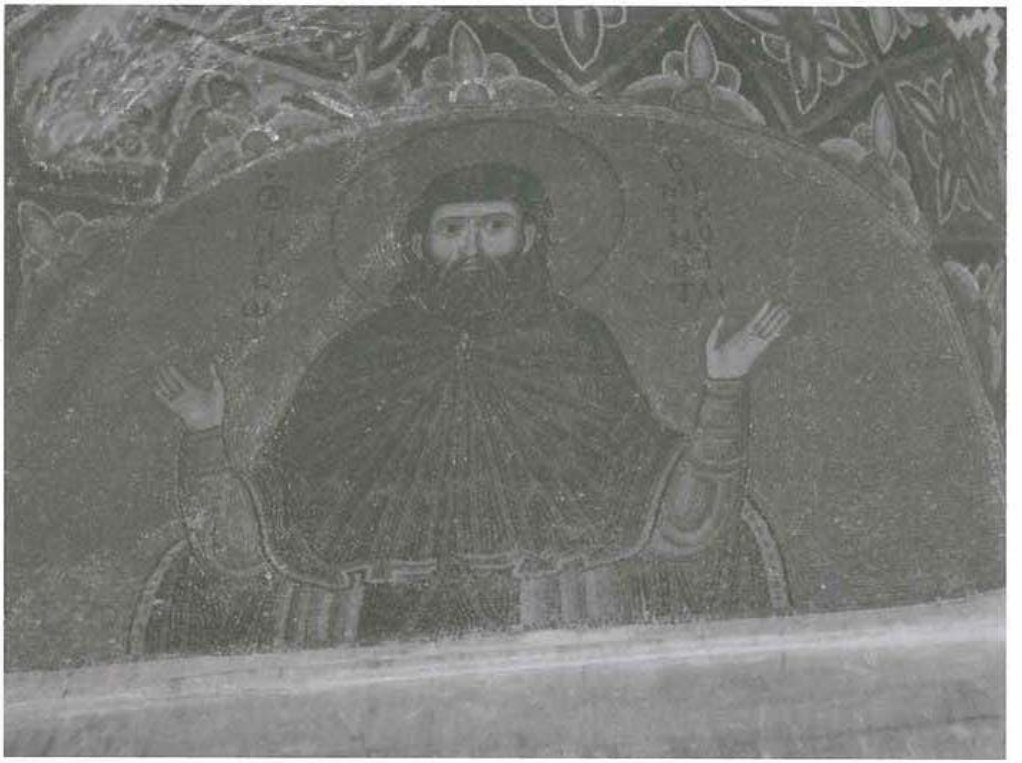
This brief reference has some interesting features. First, emphasis is placed on the church itself: the Roman monks wanted to pray specifically *in* that church and not, say, *to* any relics or icons that were in it. Second, the Byzantine reader is expected to know what church this was without any further clarification. Third, Athens was not directly on the route from Corinth to Jerusalem. Ordinarily, one would take passage on a ship sailing east and south across the Aegean, so going to Athens involved a detour, though not a major one.[11] The pilgrims from Rome apparently believed that praying to the Mother of God specifically in her church in Athens was worth the trouble, though we cannot tell whether her fame had reached Rome or whether the choice was recommended to them by locals en route. But they were probably not alone in this; Athens must have frequently hosted pilgrims from the West who stopped there on their way East. And if the shrine was famous enough in Italy to attract "secondary" pilgrims from there, we can imagine that it drew many more local pilgrims from within Greece itself. The monastery where the monks stayed would have regularly hosted such visitors. In other words, the casual assumptions behind this brief narrative would only be possible against a backdrop of constant pilgrimage to the Parthenon. The *vita* of Phantinos, which I will examine below, mentions two monks passing through Thessalonike on their way from Athos to Athens in the late tenth century, though unfortunately it does not tell us the purpose of their journey.[12]

Nikon "Repent!"

Nikon was a firebrand preacher from eastern Asia Minor who evangelized Crete in the years after the general Nikephoros Phokas reconquered it from the Arabs in 961. He then toured Greece and the Aegean preaching repentance, and finally settled in Sparta, where he expelled the Jews, founded his monastery, and died in ca. 1000 (Fig. 16). His *vita*, which was composed

[11] For routes, see Malamut (1993), examining who went where, how, and why (almost a catalogue and with considerable repetition); for travel in general, see Dimitroukas (1997); Macrides (2002).

[12] *The Life of Phantinos* 39 (pp. 446–447; cf. the commentary on 83–85); for the (unnecessary) debate as to their historicity, see Yannopoulos (1995) 480–481; di Branco (2005) 81–82.



16 Mosaic of St. Nikon "Repent!" at the monastery of Hosios Loukas.

probably in the mid eleventh century to promote his monastery, borrows heavily from the *vita* of St. Loukas, often word for word. Fortunately, this does not affect its account of Nikon's visit to Athens, which took place under different circumstances and offered no opportunities for literary imitation.

Traveling from Crete to Epidauros, Aigina, and Salamis, Nikon arrived at "the city of Kekrops," probably in 968.

> And when he came to the seaport of the city where the famous holy church of the Theometor [i.e., the Mother of God] is situated, he spoke in a voice clearer even than a Tyrsenian trumpet in his preaching of repentance. And the citizens, being very much honored for their piety and purest faith, were captured by his preaching of salvation as if by some true Sirens. They welcomed him and were in such awe that they wished to do for him those things which of old the Lykaones were seen to do for Paul and Barnabas. And one could see them practically gaping and all hanging on his most sweet voice; and for this reason he departed from them rather quickly.[13]

[13] *The Life of Nikon* 24 (pp. 94–95; tr. slightly modified). For Nikon's *vita* modeled on that of Loukas, see Sullivan's introduction, 8–18. Lampsidis (2004b) 22–23 n. 28, suspects even the Athens episode, but there are no similarities. In general, see Théologitis (2004).

There was apparently nothing for a preacher of repentance such as Nikon to do in Athens, as the Athenians seem to have acquired a reputation for exceptional piety (this became a convention about Byzantine Athens that we will encounter often below). It is probably too much to believe that this Nikon was the "monk Nikon" who, along with his fellow "brothers" Ioannes and Thomas, carved his name and a prayer on one of the columns of the Parthenon, but the possibility cannot be ruled out.[14]

This brief passage from Nikon's biography is dense in literary allusions and must be "unpacked" to be fully appreciated. When Nikon comes to Athens the author of the *vita* deploys a dense web of classical allusions, for instance by ascribing the city to "Kekrops," one of its mythical kings. This literary mode is appropriate for the city that stood for classical culture. But the author uses these allusions carefully, in order to subvert them and exalt Nikon's Christian message over their original mythological referents. The city formerly ruled by Kekrops, an autochthonous half-man half-snake, is now so pious that even the likes of Nikon found it suffocating. "Tyrsenians" is what the Greeks called the Etruscans, who were believed to have invented the trumpet. The phrase "Tyrsenian trumpet" occurs in Aischylos' *Eumenides* (567), and was one of those fixed phrases that was learned independently of its context and used as literary affectation. But this is not how it is used here, as it resonates closely with the *vita*'s aim. In Aischylos' play, it is Athena who orders her herald (κήρυξ) to sound a Tyrsenian trumpet, assemble the Athenians, and silence them so that she may speak her will to them. Standing in the very temple that used to be dedicated to Athena but was now a church of the Theometor, Nikon's voice, "heralding (κήρυγμα) salvation," rang out over the Athenians "clearer even than a Tyrsenian trumpet in his preaching of repentance." The allusion amplifies Nikon's message and draws attention to the overthrow of Aischylos' goddess. Consider also the mention of the Sirens. In the *Odyssey* (Book 12), they are magical enchantresses whose song was so beautiful that it seduced passing sailors to their doom. The image was used by the ancient philosophers and Church Fathers both positively and negatively, emphasizing either the beauty of a given "song" or the dangers that it concealed.[15] Classical literature as a whole was represented as a Siren's song by some Christians, as it was both seductive and deadly to the soul. But the Athenians were captured by Nikon's "preaching of salvation as if by some *true* Sirens."

[14] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 160–161 (no. 198).

[15] For the Fathers and the Sirens, see Rahner (1963) 328–386.

An episode set in Athens, the home of classical literature, is recounted in language full of classical allusions, only they have been taken over and made to serve the Christian message of repentance. All this may well constitute a literary response to the archaeological fact that the "famous" church of the Theometor was itself a classical pagan artifact rededicated to a holier Christian use. The author of Nikon's *vita* may have been confused about its location (he seems to have believed that it was in the Peiraieus), but he shows himself both classically educated and skilled in using his learning to subtle effect. A monk writing in eleventh-century Sparta, he knew the original context of the passages that he cites. He used their language but converted their essence to a true teaching.[16]

There is another set of allusions to Athens' dual pagan and Christian past in the *vita*'s account of Nikon's sermon. At Euboia, where he went after Athens, "he cried out, as usual, 'Repent!' The children of Euboia's inhabitants thought this unusual preaching to be a game, as often happens." The people gathered, but mostly out of curiosity (such calls to repentance were not common in the Byzantine world, in contrast to the West).[17] Compare what had happened at Athens, where the saint was defeated by having nothing to accomplish. The Athenians were so captivated by Nikon "that they wished to do for him those things which of old the Lykaones were seen to do for Paul and Barnabas." This alludes to the embarrassing event in Acts 14: when Paul healed a cripple, the people cried out, "'The gods have come down to us in human form,' and called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes." Before they could offer sacrifice to these new avatars, however, the two Apostles explained that they were only human beings who had come to preach the True God. Nikon's *vita* implies that the Athenians of the tenth century were so pious that they were about to treat Nikon as divine, which is surely only an exaggeration meant for effect. But the comparison between Nikon at Athens and Paul in Lykaonia could not but recall Paul's experience at Athens, told in Acts 17.16–34.[18] Many Athenians then had laughed at the Christian missionary, the only place where this happened to Paul in his journeys and the only place where the verb "to ridicule" (*chleuazô*) occurs in the New Testament. Byzantine Athens, then, had swung from one extreme in Acts to the other, just as it had swung from being the only city that is condemned in the Akathistos hymn to being the Virgin's chief shrine in Greece and the Balkans.

[16] For such local, classical memories in Byzantine Greece, see also Papalexandrou (2003) 64, 67.
[17] *The Life of Nikon* 26 (pp. 96–97). [18] See the end of Chapter 1.

Phantinos the Younger

The monk and founder of monasteries Phantinos (Fantinus) was born in Calabria (southern Italy) around AD 900 and died in Greece around 1000 (he is called the "Younger" to differentiate him from earlier saints of that name). Around 965, while still in Italy, he was commanded by an angel to go to Thessalonike, where he was to instil his holy zeal in others and elevate them to a peak of virtue. With two disciples, he made the crossing to Greece. But instead of traveling directly to his destination, he went south to the Peloponnesos, from there to Corinth and then on to Athens, from where he moved north to Larissa before finally reaching Thessalonike. We are not told what he did in the Peloponnesos and Corinth. At Larissa, he spent some time instructing others in the church of St. Achillios (more commonly spelled Achilleios). As for Athens, the *vita* tells us only that there was a popular desire to see him; that he fell so sick that everyone despaired of his life; and that when he recovered he calmly informed those about him that he was destined to die in Thessalonike.[19]

This does not tell us anything about the Parthenon, though it confirms the impression of Nikon's roughly contemporary visit that the Athenians were very pious. Still, the *vita* opens certain questions. Why the detour through Greece? Was it to avoid passing through Bulgarian-controlled territory, to visit holy sites and monasteries in the south, or both?[20] This question is illuminated by the entry on Phantinos in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* (a collection of brief hagiographic notices for the saints following the calendar, with each saint included under his feast-day). The author of the entry had access to the *vita*, but added this to his account of the saint's movements: "from there [Corinth] he reached Athens in order to worship at the holy and sacred temple of the Mother of God and to embrace the relic of St. Andreas."[21] This explains the purpose of Phantinos' visit, and also provides our first witness for a famous relic in Athens, though there is no reason to believe that it was housed in the Parthenon specifically.

The testimony of the *Synaxarion* is not without problems. It is not clear, for instance, which St. Andreas is meant. The *Synaxarion* itself elsewhere

[19] *Life of Phantinos* 33–36 (pp. 438–443).

[20] For travel between Italy and the Peloponnesos, see Gkagktzis *et al.* (1993) 479, citing previous bibliography on the saint. For Greece in the *vita*, see Yannopoulos (1995).

[21] *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* November 14 sec. 5 (p. 224).

mentions an Andreas from Mesopotamia martyred in Athens in the first persecutions, but it is impossible to ascertain the historicity of such entries or whether such martyrs, who were little more than names, received adoration for any sustained length of time in the place of their alleged execution. A sole inscription mentioning a saint Andreas – again, which one? – is all that survives of his cult in Athens, if indeed such evidence attests to the existence of a cult.[22] In addition, a *variant* version of the *Synaxarion* entry replaces the name of Andreas with that of the legendary St. Martinianos (a hermit from Palestine who died in Athens), while a *briefer* version omits the relics altogether, while retaining the Parthenon as Phantinos' goal in traveling to Athens (making this, overall, the more important goal, compared to the relics of Andreas/Martinianos). There is no record of a church in honor of St. Martinianos in Athens, but the last page of a sermon on him survives among the works of Michael Choniates, bishop of the city in the late twelfth century, which implies that he was celebrated on a set day. Moreover, we must also consider the strong possibility that the author(s) of the *Synaxarion* entries did not have any evidence independent of the *vita* regarding Phantinos' motives for traveling to Athens, but rather imagined his purpose based on the fame of the church and relics.[23]

And yet the possibility of hagiographic invention does not diminish the value of the *Synaxarion* entry's testimony; quite the contrary. As we saw in an earlier chapter regarding Stephanos of Sougdaia, a historical fiction that is based on what people would have found plausible at the time is often more valuable testimony than an isolated historical fact, because the former tells us what many people believed (in this case, in the capital), while the latter tells us only what one man did. Besides, given what we have seen already, it is highly unlikely that Phantinos did not visit the temple of the Mother of God while he was at Athens. Whether he traveled to that city *in order* to do so is a different matter, but the churchmen in Constantinople who wrote the *Synaxarion* clearly believed that many did just that. Thus we gain additional (albeit indirect) confirmation of the conclusion that a stream of pilgrims traveled to Athens to pray in the Parthenon in the generations before Basileios II's visit.

[22] Martyr: *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* May 18 sec. 1 (pp. 691–693). Possible church in Athens: Janin (1975) 302–303. For the problem of "St. Andreas" in Athens, see Pallas (1989) 861.

[23] For these problems, see Follieri (1987) 207–226, who gathers all the evidence relating to the cult of Martinianos in Athens; and Follieri (1993) 303–322; di Branco (2005) 80–82. For Martinianos, see p. 171 below.

Meletios the Younger and the rehabilitation of Athena

Meletios, born in ca. 1035 in a village in Kappadokia, was one of those saints who knew exactly what he wanted from childhood. At 15, rather than be married he fled to Constantinople and was tonsured a monk. He settled in a monastery not far from Thebes and would go on pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, and, possibly, Spain. Eventually he settled on a hill between Boiotia and Attica named Myoupolis, healing those who came to him in distress, establishing a strict monastic rule, and making connections with men in the upper echelons of the imperial administration. He died in ca. 1105. His monastery survives.

We have two *vitae* of Meletios, written by two quite different men who offer conflicting versions of the chronology and style of the saint's life. Nikolaos was the bishop of Methone (in the southwestern Peloponnesos) and would later become a theological advisor of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) and an enemy of Neoplatonic philosophy (he wrote a treatise against Proklos). He states that he wrote Meletios' *vita* thirty-six years after the saint's death, so ca. 1141. The incident that interests us from his version concerns some men from Rome who were sailing to Jerusalem but were forced by the winds to put in at the Peiraieus. There they were suspected as being unfriendly to the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and forbidden to leave. The official in charge was called the *athênarchos* – the "magistrate of Athens" – whom we hear about here for the first and probably last time. It is not clear what kind of position this was, whether a local "mayor" or an imperial representative. In the eleventh century, the philosopher and courtier Michael Psellos had referred in a letter to "the governor (*dioikêtês*) of Athens" who had been sent out from the capital and who found Greece depressing. It is not clear whether this is the same position as the *athênarchos* Meletios had to deal with. In any case, after being detained in the city for a few days, the men from Rome heard of Meletios and appealed to the saint in person. He recognized that they were friends of God and the emperor, and took the matter up personally with the *athênarchos*, who quickly changed his mind. The men obtained an imperial passport granting them the right to travel wherever they wished.[24]

[24] Nikolaos of Methone, *Life of Meletios the Younger* 21 (Vasil'evskij pp. 32–33; Papadopoulos pp. 60–61; cf. 5–33 for Meletios, his monastery, and his biographers). For Nikolaos, see Angelou (1984). For Byzantine passports (a neglected and fascinating topic), see Maltezou (1994). For the "governor" of Athens, see Michael Psellos, *Letter S* 33 (p. 268), and see pp. 123, 187 below.

Some elements of the story are unclear. Why did the Athenian official suspect the men in the first place? The *vita* whets our historical curiosity, but its aim is only to impress us with the (political) power of the saint. Even though the story offers a valuable glimpse into life in Athens around 1100, unfortunately it does not mention the Parthenon. The men from Rome had other purposes. The story does confirm for us, however, that travel to Jerusalem from Rome did not require and probably usually did not involve a stop at Athens, unless one *wanted* to pray at the Parthenon. This strengthens our interpretation of the pilgrims who took Loukas from Phokis to Athens. Besides, the Romans mentioned in the *vita* of Meletios were not necessarily pilgrims, given that after 1099 there was a Latin kingdom in Jerusalem. The purpose of their journey may have been political, which would explain why the authorities in Athens suspected them. Monks, or men dressed like monks or priests, were not above suspicion.[25]

Meletios' second biographer was Theodoros Prodromos, one of the most versatile, witty, and unfortunately neglected Byzantine authors, who flourished in the mid twelfth century. Prodromos wrote Lucianic satires, a romance novel, imperial orations and poems, ecclesiastical commentaries, philosophical letters, and other genres besides; and he seems to have considered himself a philosopher above all else. Most of his works cleverly contrive to be satirical and subversive in some way, and his *vita* of Meletios, which is independent of that of Nikolaos, is no exception. He uses it as yet another opportunity to expose the decadence of Byzantine social life under the Komnenoi, but his brief mention of Athens in this text is free of such concerns. Prodromos tells us that Meletios was tonsured in the great city of Constantinople, but soon sought spiritual solitude. Self-consciously following the footsteps of St. Paul on his way to Thebes in 1053, he first paid his respects to St. Demetrios in Thessalonike,

> and then moved on from there to Athens. Athens! That city once hot for idolatry, if any ever was, but hotter now in a diametrically opposite way for the worship of our supremely pure Queen and Theotokos. For if their zeal for her was so great before they fully recognized her, you can imagine how much greater it became when they did recognize her. He spent some time in the all-sacred sanctuary of the All-Holy One, and after praying to God in the way that the words of the prophet moved his lips, he decided to continue his journey.[26]

[25] Cf. Prokopios, *Wars* 2.2.1-2.

[26] Theodoros Prodromos, *Life of Meletios the Younger* 4 (Vasil'evskij p. 43; Papadopoulos p. 70; cf. 10 for the date of his journey). For a preliminary study of Prodromos, see Kazhdan (1984) c. 3. For a literary study of the *Life*, see Messis (2004).

The Parthenon is described here in superlative language, used for few church buildings in Byzantium. It is almost as if the building was as sacred a church as the Theotokos was a revered figure. Prodromos also confirms for us the picture of Athenian piety that we saw in the *vitae* of Nikon and Phantinos.

We have here in the case of Meletios another pilgrim to Athens who imagined himself as following the footsteps of St. Paul. Prodromos' account of Meletios' pilgrimage may in fact owe something to the account in Acts of Paul's experience at Athens, as did the account of Nikon's visit. The "hotness" of the Athenians' addiction to idolatry clearly refers to Acts 17.16. How things have changed!, he remarks. In addition, being an author capable of independent thought, Prodromos' allusions are subtle and deployed originally; we have to think about what they mean. For one thing, there is an ambiguous sentence about the Athenians in the middle of this brief narrative: "For if their zeal for her [i.e., the Theotokos] was so great before they fully recognized her, you can imagine how much greater it became when they did recognize her." This vague passage may be interpreted differently, as is often the case in texts written by Byzantine orators. It seems to me that Prodromos is implying that the Athenians were zealous in their piety before they recognized the Theotokos, i.e., before they converted to Christianity; in fact, he seems to be suggesting that their earlier piety was also somehow directed toward her, even if they did not explicitly recognize it as such. What might this mean?[27]

Some Byzantines, especially of the twelfth century, were broad-minded enough to recognize that the ancient Greeks and Romans were pious and decent people in their own way, even if their gods were false and perhaps even wicked. In late antiquity, as we have seen, some believed that pagan thinkers and doctrines prefigured Christianity or that they had prepared the ground for its advent. (The former were more philosophical in that they were ready to see the good in others by a standard independent of their own, while the latter accepted pagans only because they saw in them something of themselves, i.e., of Christianity.)[28] What Prodromos seems to be hinting at here, in a saint's life no less, and written for a Christian and possibly monastic audience, is the cult of the goddess Athena in the Parthenon, who was replaced by the Theotokos. Without knowing it, in their zeal for the chaste goddess of their city the Athenians were in fact worshiping the true Virgin; their zeal became greater, more explicit we could say, when they

[27] Di Branco (2000–2001) 648 and (2005) 87 misreads this passage as critical of the Athenians.

[28] For discussions, see Kaldellis (2007a), esp. c. 5, and (2008c).

converted to Christianity, dedicated their temple to the Mother of God, and so worshiped openly what they had previously done only unconsciously. If this interpretation is correct, Prodromos is effectively (albeit vaguely) accepting the worship of Athena as a prefiguration of the adoration of the Theotokos. He does not reject it in the triumphalist spirit of other writers, nor, on the other hand, does he accept Athena on her terms, even if only symbolically. By contrast, the historian Niketas Choniates blasted his fellow Byzantines for destroying out of superstitious fear a bronze statue of Athena in Constantinople soon before the conquest of their city by the Fourth Crusade (not the Promachos statue, despite claims to the contrary in the scholarship) for in his mind Athena was "the patron of manliness and wisdom."[29] Between these extremes, Prodromos is inclined to see continuity in the Parthenon as well as rupture and conversion. The Parthenon "belonged" to the Theotokos before even the Athenians knew about it. This, after all, was the effect of the oracle in the *Tübingen Theosophy* (ca. AD 500) that I examined in Chapter 1: the Parthenon had always really belonged to the Theotokos, but it took an act of reconsecration to make concrete what had been only implicit before.

The idea that the religion of ancient Athens had prefigured Christianity and that the worship of Athena in particular had prefigured the adoration of the Theotokos is expressed in another source roughly contemporary to Prodromos. After the capture of Athens by western knights in 1205, pope Innocentius III confirmed the privileges of the new Latin bishop of the city in a letter that began, in a very convoluted way, by praising Athens for its contribution to literature and by then contrasting the triad of Athens' gods to the Trinity and Pallas to the Mother of God:

> The renewal of grace [i.e., the Incarnation and the advent of Christianity] is not thought to have made obsolete the ancient glory of the city of Athens – which renewal, as the outline of modern religion first appeared in that city's original foundation, took the worship which it offered in three parts to three different false gods and converted it to the worship of the true and indivisible Trinity, which consists of three persons and no more – when zeal for worldly knowledge had been changed into a desire for divine wisdom, divine grace humbled the citadel of the most famous Pallas in the seat now given to the most glorious Mother of the True God, the city that had once erected an altar to the Unknown God.[30]

[29] Niketas Choniates, *History* 559. But in a different mode, she was the "false Parthenos" (158).

[30] Innocentius III, *Letter 256 to Bérard, Archbishop of Athens*; see Koder (1977) 129–130. The translation is my own.

We note again that the temple of Athena is described as "most famous" and that the conversion from paganism to Christianity – from the three gods to the one God with three persons, from wordly knowledge to divine wisdom – is cast as a smooth translation rather than a sudden rupture. The belief that the worship of Pallas prefigured that of the Theotokos is supported with reference to St. Paul, who, in his speech to the Athenians in Acts, cast his God in the guise of the Unknown God worshiped by the pagan Athenians. The Christian view of Athens was, as we have often seen, ambiguous. Paul's acceptance of a pagan Altar had, in late antiquity, given rise to the oracle that was later used to justify the conversion of the Parthenon. What Paul exploited as an opening for his new God, Prodromos exploited in order to implicitly rehabilitate the pagan past to which he was personally and professionally devoted. We will find, in the story that yet remains to be told, that other Byzantine intellectuals did the same when they faced the Parthenon and had to make sense of its enduring and enigmatic meaning.

It is unlikely, moreover, that the pope came up with all this on his own. Most likely he was quoting in his response the words that Bérard, the new Latin archbishop of Athens, had used in his petition. It has been suggested that Bérard was in turn copying a decree defining the rights of the Athenian Church issued by the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (ca. 1150) and kept at Athens, possibly in the Parthenon. The idea that the pagan religion of ancient Athens had prefigured Christianity and the Theotokos cult in particular may, then, have been part of the ideological self-image of the Athenian Church at the very time when Prodromos was writing the *vita* of Meletios, and had been confirmed by no less an authority than the Byzantine emperor.[31]

Saewulf, Guido, and the light of Athens

Our sources for pilgrimage to the Parthenon are evenly spread out for the two centuries between 900 and 1100. I conclude this chapter with two brief notices about Athens in Latin texts written at the end of this period, which show how this famous Byzantine shrine was being advertised in the West. We have seen in the *vita* of St. Loukas that some western pilgrims en route

[31] Macrides and Magdalino (1992) 142–143 n. 142. That the pope refers to the *arx* of Pallas rather than to her temple supports this theory, because it reveals knowledge of Athenian topography. On the other hand, his reference to a pagan triad of gods indicates that perhaps he has modeled Athens on Rome, whose Capitolium was also called an *arx*.

to Jerusalem were interested in making the detour to visit Athens as early as the beginning of the tenth century. Western interest would naturally peak in the period of Latin rule over Athens (1205–1456), at the end of which period the Parthenon made the further transition from religious pilgrimage to archaeological curiosity, at least in the mind of Kyriacus of Ancona.

The Anglo-Saxon pilgrim Saewulf has left us with an account of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1102–1103. Unfortunately we know nothing about the man beyond what this text tells us, and it does not give personal information. As in all narratives of this kind, the pride of place is devoted to the Holy Lands, but brief mention is made of stopping-points along the way. Saewulf apparently had to travel by securing passage on trading ships, which made his progress slow and necessitated delays and detours. He notes the Christian attractions of each location, focusing on the saints. For instance Patras was where St. Andreas died and was entombed and Corinth where the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel and addressed his Epistles. From there Saewulf crossed to Thebes and on to Euboia (*Nigrepontum*), associated here with St. Bartholomeus. It is at this point in his journey that he includes an entry on Athens that is longer in comparison to the other entries so far and this because it includes mention of a monument. Athens is where Paul preached and where the learned St. Dionysios was converted by him; here also is the church of the Blessed Virgin Maria, "which has a lamp that burns always and never needs oil."[32]

Saewulf then took passage on a ship that crossed the Aegean, probably on a trading run, but it is not clear from where he set sail exactly. Nor is it entirely clear that he actually visited Athens. It is possible that he obtained the above information from locals, though he must have been very impressed with what they told him about the church of Athens to include in his account this material regarding a place he did not visit. It is likely that he did visit the Parthenon (after all, there is almost a month that is not accounted for at this stage in his itinerary). What strikes us about his information is of course the ever-burning lamp, not the only one known to the medieval world.[33] It is the first reference in our sources to a miraculous object in the Parthenon and, even though we will find no specific confirmation of the existence of a *lamp* in the plentiful sources for Athens in the twelfth century, still, we will find that the temple was associated with a divine light in many different ways that were variations on the same underlying theme. Saewulf may be giving us the prosaic reality behind the

[32] Saewulf, *Peregrinatio* 32–37 (p. 60; cf. 40 for J. H. Pryor's study of Saewulf's voyages).

[33] See van der Vin (1980) v. I, 199 and v. II, 511; for ever-burning lamps, v. I, 199–200, 306.

elaborate rhetorical amplifications that were to follow. I will turn to this theme more directly after we have witnessed enough of the variations to make the problem curious and in need of a solution.

Our second reference to the divine light of Athens comes from another Latin writer of the same period about whom we also know nothing. In 1119, a certain Guido compiled a book of geographical extracts that was accompanied by a world-map. Little scholarship has been devoted to this obscure, derivative author, and most of it has focused on the map. In his list of the cities around the Mediterranean, Guido gives some basic information about the most important ones, deciding importance by both Christian and pagan (usually mythological) criteria. So Chalkedon is noted for the martyr Euphemia, Larissa for Achilles and the Myrmidons, Sparta for Paris' abduction of Helen, and Thessalonike for Sts. Paul and Demetrios. Athens is cited as the *genitrix* of philosophers and orators, which now has the divine and inextinguishable light shining in the temple of the prophet that Iason built and dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God Maria with great luxury and gleaming marble. *Propheta* is probably a mistake for *Propiliae*, i.e., Propylaia, which are confused here with the Parthenon.[34] I have been unable to locate the source of this information, if it existed in written form. Nor is it clear who has been confused with Iason (the Argonaut?). Can there possibly be a link here to the *Tübingen Theosophy* oracle, which existed in double form, one for the temple at Kyzikos founded by Iason and another for the Athenian Parthenon?

What is interesting in Guido's account, as with Saewulf, is that medieval Athens is instantly identified with the Parthenon (though under a garbled name), and that the Parthenon is an important shrine not for any relics it contained or any invented role that it played in Christian history; rather, it radiates a divine and inextinguishable light, which, in the cultural associations evoked by Guido's account, may not be unconnected to the fact that Athens is also the metropolis of orators and philosophers. The light of the temple may be due to the "gleaming marble" of which it was built. These are possibilities that I will consider below, when I turn to examine the image of Christian Athens as the Light-Giver of the medieval world.

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that the Parthenon was a pilgrimage site in Byzantine Greece (and we are about to consider much more evidence from the twelfth century), though this has yet to be recognized in the scholarly literature, perhaps because of its incongruity. To be sure, one does come across references to the same three people (Loukas, Nikon,

[34] Guido, *Geographica* 110 (p. 136); see Beazley (1949) 632–633.

Basileios), but they are called pilgrims in this connection because they obviously appear in that guise in the sources and not because the phenomenon in general has been recognized.[35] So these isolated cases have not led to any conclusions about Athens or about the Byzantines who traveled there. For example, books on Byzantine Greece and pilgrimage make no mention of this development.[36] "Pilgrimage to the Parthenon" is usually treated as an essentially modern and western phenomenon associated with Romantic or National Hellenism.[37]

By examining the sources for Athens in the years from 900 to 1100, we find that the city had essentially been identified with the Parthenon, its chief attraction by far. The mere mention of the "temple in Athens" in Byzantine texts sufficed to designate the Parthenon for both Constantinopolitan and provincial audiences. Nor was this fascination with the building confined to bookish circles who admired it from afar. Many pilgrims took the road or sailed the seas to visit Athens, climb the Akropolis, pray in the world-renowned church of the Theotokos, and possibly carve their name on one of the city's monuments. By my estimate it was the fourth most important pilgrimage site in the empire after the capital, Thessalonike, and Ephesos. The temple itself was the main attraction, not any relics or icons that may have been contained in it nor any miracle that was supposed to take place in it. We hear of no miraculous healings. Phantinos' recovery, when he fell ill at Athens, seems to have been natural, and the relics of Andreas/Martinianos that he embraced were not necessarily kept on the Akropolis. On the other hand, of all visitors to Athens during this period, only the emperor Basileios had it as his primary destination; all others visited it on the way to more important places, for western travelers to the Holy Lands and for wandering Byzantine saints like Nikon and Meletios to the place where they settled and founded their monasteries (Sparta and Boiotia). Still, these men were long-distance travelers. It is likely that Athens functioned as a primary destination for pilgrims traveling solely within Greece. We must also not forget how limited our sources are: "they are often sketchy, barely describing the journeys either of the saints' devotees or of the saints themselves when they

[35] Casual references to pilgrims: Setton (1975b) III 197; Herrin (1975) 260, 266; Tanoulas (1997) 18; and Kazanaki-Lappa (2002) 642. The strongest statements are by Pavan (1983) 38–39, 44; and Kazanaki-Lappa (2003) 206: "The Great Church of Athens – the Parthenon in its new guise – came to be renowned throughout the Empire as a place of Pilgrimage." But nothing else is said about the matter; no detail, context, additional evidence, or explanation are offered.

[36] E.g., Koder and Hild (1976) 126–129; Hunger (1990) 43–61; Malamut (1993); Scholz (1997), with a chapter on pilgrimage! See also the essays on "Pilgrimage in the Byzantine Empire, 7th–15th Centuries," *DOP* 56 (2002) 59–241.

[37] E.g., Tsigakou (2003) 294: "A Place of Pilgrimage."

visited holy sites."[38] They do not tell us how exactly each pilgrim experienced the Parthenon and what he thought of it or the ruins of Athens around it. Was there a historical or antiquarian dimension to travel in Byzantine Athens that perhaps approximated modern tourism?

That is a question I will address below, both because of its intrinsic interest and also because it has been neglected in the scholarship. If we consider for now the two hagiographers who embellished their heroes' visits to Athens, namely the anonymous biographer of Nikon and Prodromos' *vita* of Meletios, we find that Christian Athens continued to evoke classical resonances. The saints' visits provided occasions for a new defeat of paganism, accomplished in Nikon's *vita* with the enemy's own weapons, allusions to classical poems. In Prodromos' *vita* of Meletios, a visit to Athens called for a partial rehabilitation of the city's pagan past. Saints arriving at the most important Christian shrine in Greece in the eleventh century still felt that they were following the footsteps of St. Paul, who evangelized the place for the first time but in a way that incorporated its pagan traditions within the new message of salvation. The city's paganism was never quite forgotten, and visitors were often overaware of the "continuity" of worship on the rock. It was, perhaps, only the celebrated Christian piety of the Byzantine Athenians that took the teeth out of a religious relationship that may have otherwise been too close for comfort, making it a topic for literary allusion and playfulness rather than fiery condemnation. Oddly, both the anonymous provincial hagiographer and the Constantinopolitan teacher of classical studies were extremely adept at this, proving implicitly in their narratives that Christian Athens was still great because of the fame of the pagan city it once was.

[38] Weyl Carr (2002) 88.

5 | The apogee of the Atheniotissa in the twelfth century

After suffering a series of humiliating and costly defeats in the eleventh century and permanently losing eastern and central Asia Minor, Byzantium rebounded under the military Komnenoi dynasty to again become a major Mediterranean power in the twelfth century. The provincial economy continued to grow, which benefited the cities, increased tax revenue, and widened the scope of patronage for art and literature in the capital. Classical scholarship, original literature such as romance novels and satires, and orations and letters for many occasions illuminate the society and tastes of this period like no other in Byzantium since late antiquity. Young men from the provinces flocked to the capital to acquire a higher education, hoping for posts in the administration, the Church, or, at least, the public schools. Many were appointed bishops back in the provinces and, while they grumbled at the low levels of culture in their new homes (compared to Constantinople), they generally worked hard on behalf of their flocks, making good use of the connections they had forged in the capital. Many also continued their friendships through letters and infrequent visits. These networks of bishops and ex-professors illuminate life in the provinces more brightly than before and, with the loss of eastern Asia Minor, the focus of our sources is fixed more firmly on Greece than before. Athens especially benefits from this new attention.

At least three bishops of Athens in the twelfth century were involved in frequent correspondence with other members of the imperial-literary elite. They received letters from scholars in the capital and were eulogized in funeral orations. These were Georgios Bourtzes (1153–1160); Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites (1160–1175); and Michael Choniates (1182–1205, d. 1222; whom I will discuss in the next chapter). Interestingly, particular conventions developed for writing to a bishop of Athens. After all, the authors of our sources were classically educated and the very name of the city brought innumerable associations to mind. These classicizing conventions show a concern for balancing the ancient glory with the humble current state of a city whose history, topography, and literature these scholars knew intimately, even if at a distance. In this chapter we will focus on the emphasis that they placed on the church of the Mother of

God in their efforts to express what contemporary Athens meant to them. The Parthenon was in fact one of the first things that came to mind when they thought about the city. These texts provide additional testimony to the shrine's importance and fame in the Byzantine world and attest to the existence of a large fair attended by people from afar. That was a sign of the shrine's success and popularity. To complement the texts of the scholars, we have documents which reveal that the Theotokos Atheniotissa – "the Lady of Athens" – had become a "brand name" exported to the far corners of the empire.

Moreover, the survival of documentary sources from this period allows us to recreate an image of medieval Athens, including aspects of its urban layout, neighborhoods, and families. So before examining the evidence for the Parthenon provided by the Komnenian scholars, let us imagine what Athens was like in the twelfth century.

Athens in the twelfth century

After the sixth century, especially in the aftermath of the invasions by the Avars and Slavs in the Balkans and the Persians and Arabs in the East, provincial towns ceased to have central planning. To be sure, Constantinople and Thessalonike, which were founded or refounded on a massive scale in late antiquity to serve as imperial capitals, never lost the structure imposed by central avenues leading to palaces, hippodromes, and basilicas. But as the provincial cities recovered from the devastation of the Dark Age, they developed more "organically," following uncoordinated private needs and initiatives. There was little planning as there were no authorities to regulate the expansion. Previously public space was now built up; residential, retail, and industrial buildings went up side by side; and streets were not planned central avenues but rather alleys that varied in width as they wound among the houses and shops, in some cases leading to a dead end.[1] A visitor to Byzantine Athens in particular would have received the impression of a city living within the ruins of its past, growing out of its ancient foundations, dotted and defined by the monuments of its former glory.

In the case of twelfth-century Athens, we are not in a position to discuss demography and size or even draw a basic map. The city at this time surrounded the Akropolis, but only the ancient agora has been systematically

[1] For this, and some of what follows, see Bouras (1981) (a survey of cities across the empire: 625–628 on Athens); Bouras (1998); for Athens' urban development, Travlos (1993).

excavated and published, and it is only recently that attention has been given to the Byzantine remains. For long they were regarded as a nuisance that had to be cleared away before the more interesting classical levels could be reached. One neighborhood partially excavated in the agora revealed houses with open central courtyards and wells, all densely packed around a narrow street. Some of the foundations and masonry of these Byzantine houses were borrowed from the ancient structures that lay directly underneath, a practice common in Byzantine cities. The houses were sometimes designed around wells reused from classical, Hellenistic, or Roman times, often with their original well-heads intact (elevated to match the rising ground level). The Parthenon, then, was hardly a unique instance of such architectural recycling. Most Athenians would have been fully aware that they lived in the historical shadow of the ancient city. Their engagement with it, then, extended from the material circumstances of their daily lives to the most elevated aspects of their religious worship on the Akropolis. One house from an earlier Byzantine period had a sunken storage container (*pithos*) whose bottom rested on one of the steps of the recently discovered (1981) Stoa Poikile. (This was where the philosopher Zenon would lecture, whence his followers were called Stoics.) In the mid 1180s, the bishop Michael Choniates claimed that one could still see a small piece of this Stoa (which was originally some 36 m long), but we cannot know what building he was identifying with that famous name. A nearby chapel, meanwhile, was oriented away from due east in order to reuse Roman foundations, while the eleventh-century church of the Holy Apostles in the agora (see Fig. 18) was built on the foundations of a Roman fountain and reused classical capitals for its interior colonnades (this was common in Byzantine churches) (Fig. 17).[2]

While some churches were built on the foundations of ancient buildings, others were basically converted pagan temples. The Parthenon was not the only Athenian temple reused as a church. In order to understand how classical past and Byzantine present melded together in twelfth-century Athens, we must set aside familiar periodizations, the notion that each period has distinctive forms of art and architecture, and imagine the past still present and active in the medieval present. The temple just west of the agora dedicated in antiquity to the god Hephaistos (called Theseion today)

[2] Shear (1984) 50–57; (1997) 521–546. For the Stoa Poikile, see Camp (1992) 68–72; and Michael Choniates, *Address to the* praitôr *Demetrios Drimys* 5 (v. I, p. 160). For the Holy Apostles, see Frantz (1971). I am not convinced of the historicity of the Norman invasion of Athens in 1147, mentioned by many scholars.

17 Ancient capital and Byzantine frescos in the church of the Holy Apostles (Athens, agora).

was known to Choniates as the church of St. Georgios in the Kerameikos and had apparently continued in Christian use since late antiquity.[3] If we think of it as a church rather than a temple – because to the Byzantines for a thousand years it actually *was* a church – we will come closer to understanding what medieval Athens felt like. Fig. 18, then, shows two Byzantine churches of Athens.

Amy Papalexandrou has discussed the problem of "the interference of modern sensibilities" in the way in which we imagine the Byzantine cityscape:

> We prefer to experience buildings isolated in space so that they are somehow more pure, or noble, and less adulterated by anachronistic context. The churches of Skripou [in Boiotia] and the Little Metropolis, for example, are now free on all sides and preceded by large public squares … Our modern interventions have made it progressively more difficult for us to reconstruct the messy vitality in the overlap of ancient and later structures, or the medieval context in which the creation of new

[3] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 116.4 (p. 193).

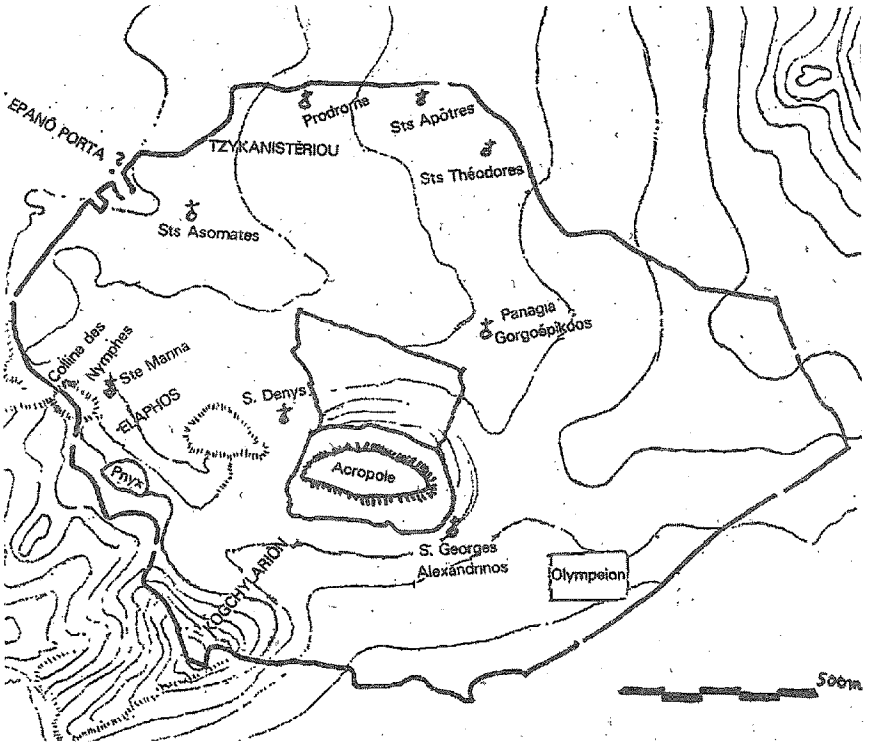
18. Two Byzantine churches in the Athenian agora: the Holy Apostles and St. Georgios by the Kerameikos (formerly the temple of Hephaistos).

walls from ancient fragments was but a natural exponent of a greater sense of continuity with the past and its physical residue.[4]

Like the physical remains of antiquity, many of the ancient deme and place-names of Attica continued in use, as they have in modern times. We are fortunate in this regard to possess a mutilated fragment of a copy of a *praktikon* from ca. 1100; this is "a register of the properties belonging to an ecclesiastical institution in Athens, probably a big monastery, and of the *paroikoi* [tenant-farmers] working on those lands. Each entry lists the nature of the property (field, vineyard, etc.), the names of the neighbours, the dimensions and the area of land. The *paroikoi* are listed village by village, with their names, the number of family members and the taxable potential of each family. This precious document gives the names of forty villages or localities and over a hundred families in Attica."[5] Some

[4] Papalexandrou (2003) 76; see also (2001a) 247.

[5] Kazanaki-Lappa (2003) 208 and (2002) 643–644. For the text and commentary, see Granstrem *et al.* (1976).



19 Place-names of Athens based on the *praktikon* (drawing from Granstrem *et al.* [1976] 26).

of the family names attested in this document – Pistophilos, Pleurites, and Phokas – are also mentioned in Choniates' correspondence; others were obviously taken from a place of origin (Andriotes) or profession (Chalkeus).

The properties listed in the *praktikon* are either in the suburbs and country or in the city itself, which in standard Byzantine fashion is here designated the *kastron* (citadel) and defined by what was left of the ancient walls (Fig. 19). The latter are called here the *basilikon teichos* (the imperial wall). Choniates calls the inhabitants of the *kastron* the *kastrenoi*.[6] The "Upper Gate" with the nearby "ancient ruins" is probably the Dipylon. We see here how the ruins were used in an everyday way to give directions and delimit properties. The city's medieval topography – its psychogeography – was still defined in part with reference to antiquity, and it seems from the location of many of the Byzantine churches that its main roads still followed the same routes as their ancient counterparts.[7] It should also come as no surprise that the walls enclosed many cultivated fields, as they included

[6] Michael Choniates, *Memorandum to Alexios III Angelos* (p. 286).
[7] Moschonas (1996) 152.

more territory than was taken up by the urban fabric of either ancient or Byzantine Athens.

The *praktikon* does not give us anything like a complete list of urban regions and suburbs, as it mentions places only when the monastery in question owned property in the vicinity. Within the walls we find a Tzykanisterion (if the editors' reading is correct). This was a playing field for the Byzantine version of polo, the *tzykanion*, a popular sport. The imperial palace in Constantinople had one, and we learn from the *vita* of St. Nikon that there was one at Sparta too. Sunday services were once interrupted by the game being played next to the church by the provincial governor of the Peloponnesos, Gregorios, and the locals, and when Nikon came out to protest, the governor, who was losing, told him to get lost and had him escorted out of town.[8]

The "district of the Konchylarioi," or "dye-workers" (whence English conch), was probably located just to the south of the Akropolis, between it and the Hill of the Muses. Choniates refers in a letter to murex-fishing fleets from Chalkis, Karystos, and Athens.[9] The dye was probably exported to Thebes, a center for the manufacture of silk. Athens was apparently an important trading center, as it is included among the ports where the Venetians were allowed by the Komnenoi emperors to conduct business free of tax.[10] In fact, pottery and ceramics of Athenian or Attic origin were exported in this period to the West (Italy and southern France). "Athens is a good candidate to emerge as a major center of production and export when more archaeological evidence is studied."[11]

Beyond the walls, Eleusis and the Peiraieus are fixed points of reference for specifying the location of some properties in the *praktikon* (Fig. 20). The ancient deme (and modern suburb) of Kephissia appears as Kybissas, but other place-names are not so easy to identify. The same is true of the many place-names in the long letter sent by pope Innocentius III to the Latin bishop of Athens after 1205, by which he confirmed the bishop's rights over the territories claimed by Athens' ecclesiastical jurisdiction. We recognize Menidi, Dekeleia, and Marathon, but other places are either unknown or unrecognizable in the distorting mirror of their Latinization.[12] In the mid seventeenth century, at any rate, the Athenians apparently referred to the

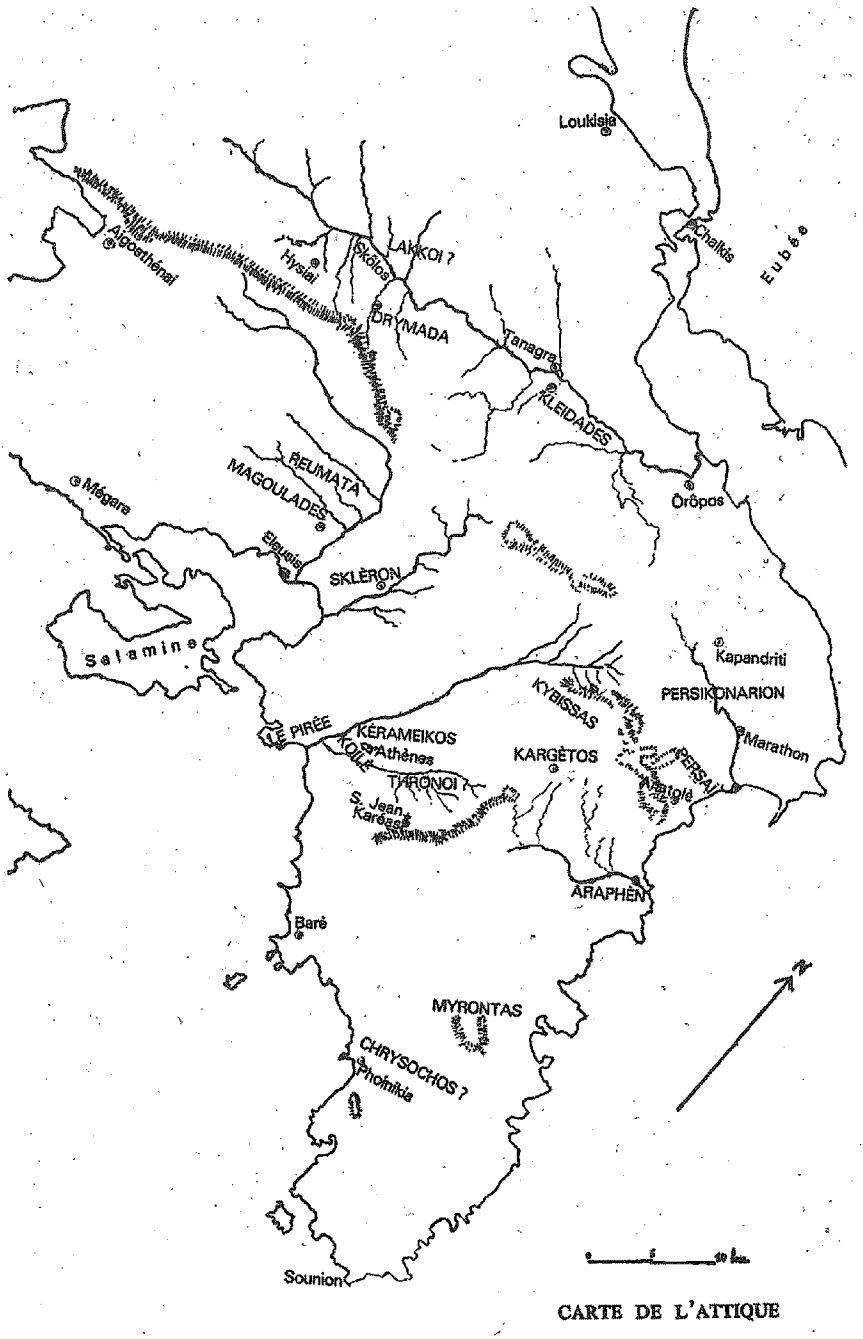
[8] *The Life of Nikon* 39 (pp. 134–137).

[9] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 135.2 (p. 222). For Athens, Thebes, and murex, see Laiou and Morrisson (2007) 127.

[10] For these treaties, see Frankopan (2004).

[11] Laiou and Morrisson (2007) 118.

[12] Innocentius III, *Letter 256 to Bérard, Archbishop of Athens*; see Longnon (1948); Koder (1977); and Mouzakis (1998).



20 Place-names of Attica based on the *praktikon* (drawing from Granstrem *et al.* [1976] 20).

mountains around the city by their ancient names (slightly distorted), so it is safe to assume that they did so also in Byzantine times.[13] The rich vineyards of Dekeleia – where the Spartans established a fort in the Peloponnesian War – were contested in a legal wrangle that made it all the way to the capital. The bishop of Athens Ioannes Blachernites (d. 1086) was an infirm and naive old man who had no advisors. He gave or leased away properties of the Church of Athens against canon law, including lands, vineyards, mills, and goats. At least this is what was alleged by his successor Niketas (d. 1103), who petitioned the patriarch and synod in Constantinople to restore the rights and secure the revenues of his see. Church properties, he argued, should be leased with an eye to both quantity and quality. Niketas also had something to say about properties "within the gates" of the city that were exploited by some of the *kastrenoi*.[14] The epitaphs of both bishops are carved onto the columns of the Parthenon, Niketas' twice for some reason (see Fig. 13).[15]

The need to register and define properties and to secure favorable leases indicates increasing cultivation and an expanding demographic base. A roughly contemporary cadaster of properties from nearby Thebes reveals that Athenians owned or leased land there too.[16] From these documents we can imagine that overland pilgrims to Athens in this period would have passed through miles of fields, vineyards, and pasturage before reaching the *kastron*. The town itself and the surrounding countryside were at this very time being endowed with many new churches and monasteries. In fact, more churches from this period survive in Athens than in any other city of Greece. The Attic countryside was also dotted with monasteries in pleasant or strategic locations, such as those at Daphni and Kaisariani.[17]

In contrast to the ancient monuments, however, the political institutions of democratic Athens were totally buried by this point, known only to scholars and antiquarians. Power in the Byzantine provinces emanated from Constantinople. The governor of the province of Hellas (which was, at some point, joined with the province of the Peloponnesos) normally resided at Thebes, but all manner of officials must have passed through Athens regularly on imperial business. As we will see below, in the late

[13] Cited in Giakovaki (2006) 279. Few scholar-travelers had visited Athens in the meantime. It appears that Lykabettos and Pentelikon were confused in the late seventeenth century: Beschi and Tanoulas (2000–2003) 383, 387.

[14] The petition is cited in a patriarchal document from the 1160s: Uspenskii (1900) 30–42.

[15] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 45–46 (no. 58); 52–53 and 176–177 (nos. 62 and 222).

[16] Svoronos (1959).

[17] For the Byzantine churches of Athens, see Kourniotes and Soteriou (1927–1933); Janin (1975) 298–340; Bouras (2003).

twelfth century the governor was barred by imperial order from visiting Athens, but when this took effect is not known. When we looked at the *vita* of Meletios in the previous chapter, we found a reference to a certain *athênarchos* in ca. 1100. This chief Athenian official was either on the governor's staff or a local notable appointed to represent the city to the governor. The bishop was probably the most powerful man in the city, mostly because his post was tenured and so he could build up enduring and local networks of support; because he controlled the sizable assets of the Church; and because he had access to imperial officials. The bishop could plead for tax-breaks and exemptions for his city and recommend local men to the staff of a general or court secretary.

There is little that we can say about intellectual life in middle Byzantine Athens, apart, that is, from the learned bishops of the twelfth century who, as we will see, were eulogized in conventional terms for restoring Athenian culture to its ancient heights of Attic perfection. A few other Athenians made their mark on imperial society in this age. Anna Komnene, in the narrative that she wrote of her father's reign, the *Alexiad*, digresses to discuss some astrologers who appeared at the court. Among others she mentions one Katanankes from Athens, whose predictions were always wrong, or, rather, a bit "off." The name means "Compel by Force" (or some such thing) and may have been a professional nickname, though it is independently attested as a family name.[18] An Athenian student of philosophy named Mousaios appears in a quasi-satirical Platonic dialogue written near the middle of the twelfth century by Theodoros Prodromos, whose *Life of Meletios the Younger* I discussed earlier. In the dialogue, Mousaios has come from Athens to Constantinople to hear from Xenedemos about the latter's teacher, the famous Theokles (who may be Prodromos' own friend Michael Italikos in disguise). As per the dramatic framing of so many Platonic dialogues, Xenedemos recounts a discussion he once had with Theokles on the principles of logic. Of course, we cannot treat Mousaios as a historical person. But there is a deeper point here. By casting the dialogue in Platonic language and making Constantinople seem, in effect, like the Athens of Sokrates, and by making Mousaios have to come from Athens to Constantinople, Prodromos effectively casts the Byzantine capital as the heir to the ancient city of the Muses.[19]

[18] Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 6.7.5. For a commentary on this digression, see Magdalino (2003), esp. 23 on Katanankes. Magdalino conjectures that he belonged to a family tradition of astrologers whose origins lay in late antiquity.

[19] Theodoros Prodromos, *Xenedemos or Voices*; see the astute analysis by Charalambopoulos (2005). For Constantinople as the heir of Sokratic philosophy, see Michael Psellos, *To his students regarding philosophy and rhetoric* 26; cf. Kaldellis (2007a) 221.

Despite its many monasteries, Byzantine Athens apparently never hosted any famous saints for long. Ambitious Athenian ascetics generally traveled elsewhere, for example the eunuch Symeon, attested by Theophylaktos of Bulgaria as being from Athens, who became an abbot on Athos and founded a monastery for eunuchs in Thessalonike. It has been argued that he was the same as Symeon the Sanctified, formerly the *megas droungarios* Stephanos who retired in 1078.[20] *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* recounts the story of another monk from Athens named Paphnoutios who traveled to Rome and gained a reputation for holiness and powers of healing. But the Devil led him to rape and murder a girl placed in his charge, after which he traveled to Asia Minor and shut himself in a cave seeking forgiveness, until he was shot by a shepherd by accident.[21]

In this chapter and the next I will focus chiefly on the bishops of Athens in the later twelfth century. As learned outsiders who took up episcopal duties in a new city, they were the chief custodians of the Parthenon, the center of interest for many who visited Athens in the years before it passed from Byzantine control forever. Higher secular officials kept their posts for a few years at most, but a city's bishops were there to stay. In their correspondence with other bishops, scholars, and officials, they defined Athens in terms of its classical past and pious present, and actively promoted its prestige in a Christian world.

Georgios Bourtzes (1153–1160)

In the wealth of sources relating to Athens and its bishops in the second half of the twelfth century, we can discern a set of conventions for talking about the city. These reflect a strategy that Byzantine scholars formulated to handle the contrast between the city's ancient glory and its current decline, as least as the latter was perceived by those who idolized ancient Athens. This was an issue already in the tenth century. A letter addressed to Theodoros, *synkellos* of the Church of Athens (i.e., the bishop's assistant), and attributed to Alexandros of Nikaia, notes that the city's new bishop Theodegios does not much like his "golden Athens." But, the letter continues, under his pious guidance it will become more than just golden; it will

[20] Theophylaktos Hephaistos, *Defense of Eunuchs* (pp. 328–329); see Ringrose (2003) 125–126; Tougher (2006) 243–244.

[21] *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* 37–40. The text says only that he lived "many years" before Lazaros (who died in 1053). An all-too-similar tale is told of the hermit Iakobos in the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* October 10 sec. 3 (pp. 128–130).

surpass even its own reputation. Theodegios died in 1006, as his epitaph, carved twice on two columns of the Parthenon, attests.[22]

In the next century, the philosopher and courtier Michael Psellos wrote to the chief judge in Greece and the Peloponnesos, who was dissatisfied with what he found there. If you aren't pleased with those most famous places, Psellos asks, then what part of the earth would please you? "All that Attic literature and all that the ancient wise men wrote about the Peiraieus, was it a lie and in vain?" Well, he adds, make the most of what you find. In another letter, he relates that an official in charge of Athens lamented his fate when he saw "most famous Greece" for the first time, as it reminded him of Skythia (he was probably the governor of the province, not a strictly Athenian official, though his office may have been that of the *athênarchos* whom St. Meletios confronted ca. 1100).[23] Many Byzantine visitors to Athens, especially clergy and high officials, had evidently formed an exalted idea of the city based on their education and were invariably disappointed when they confronted the sad state of contemporary Athens. It may have been a flourishing provincial town by Byzantine standards, but that was obviously not enough to satisfy the classicizing imagination.

Psellos' banal advice for officials who did not like what they found in Greece was that they should work hard to make it better. The letter attributed to Alexandros of Nikaia suggests something more sublime in the case of bishop Theodegios: through his piety and guidance of Athens' spiritual life he can make it greater than its own reputation claims that it was in antiquity. This alludes to the one advantage that Byzantine Athens had over "golden Athens," namely that it was a Christian city. This strategy was developed further by the writers of the twelfth century, and here the Parthenon functioned as both a link between past and present and a Christian consolation for the loss of ancient glory.

Let us turn, then, to a letter sent in 1154 by Georgios Tornikes, a secretary of the Patriarchate (and soon to be appointed bishop of Ephesos), to Georgios Bourtzes, the bishop of Athens. Bourtzes had apparently just returned from Dyrrachion (classical Epidamnos), where he had spent some time while on an aborted mission to Italy. "And now," writes Tornikes, "instead of telling us all about the Capitolium, the Forum of Appius, and the Three Taverns, which you would have done had you returned out of Italy [an allusion to Paul's journey to Rome: Acts 28.15],

[22] Alexandros of Nikaia, *Letter* 18 (p. 96). Theodegios: Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 65–66 and 157 (nos. 73 and 196). On chronological grounds, Markopoulos (1994) 318–320 denies that Alexandros was the author of this letter, and proposes Symeon Logothetes instead.

[23] Michael Psellos, *Letters S* 26, 33 (pp. 261–262, 268). For the *athênarchos*, see p. 103 above.

indulge in Hellenic sights (*theamata*); instead of that barbarian and arrogant tongue [Latin], take your fill of elegant Attic." This suggests that the ancient Greek monuments were indeed tourist "sights" for the Byzantines. Bourtzes has returned to Athens, where there were plenty to see and where the language was, according to the code of classicizing signs, "Attic." But, Tornikes continues, his laughter should be mixed with tears, for Athens is now lacking in wisdom, freedom, noble speech, and grace. Instead of the likes of Sokrates and Plato, one finds only bronze-workers plying their trade. In one paragraph, then, we witness the triumph of things Greek over things Italian followed by a lament for the decline of the present compared to sage antiquity. Still, Tornikes is not entirely disconsolate. He exhorts Bourtzes to set aside the old protector of his city, Athena Pallas, that *undignified* virgin, in favor of its new patron, the Mother of God, who is not vouched for by any *myths*. St. Paul's visit had made Athens a greater city than it had even been in the classical past.[24]

Tornikes, then, finally settles this complex arbitration of cultural heritage – Greek vs. Latin, past vs. present, pagan vs. Christian – by a strong affirmation of Christian triumphalism, in which the conversion of the Parthenon plays a crucial symbolic role. We note, first of all, that the Parthenon was still associated closely with Athena Pallas, over six centuries after the temple's conversion. Tornikes has to exhort Bourtzes to "set Athena aside" in favor of the Mother of God, which indicates how closely the pagan past was still bound up with Christian worship at the Byzantine Parthenon. The two were entwined and had to be separated anew with each rhetorical move.

For Tornikes, classical culture is admirable, but no substitute for God's grace. Yet now the Athenians can have both, for Bourtzes is both a bishop and "a friend of rhetoric and of the Muses." The Athenians' place in the Christian world is guaranteed by "the all-pure Virgin Theotokos," who, he graciously concedes, is their special civic protector. Though writing from Constantinople, a city also devoted to the worship of the Theotokos, at the end of his letter Tornikes asks Bourtzes to pray to her on his behalf. Evidently, he regarded prayers from the Parthenon as especially efficacious. In another letter to Bourtzes, Tornikes refers to the "all-pure Virgin (*Parthenos*)" as "yours," implying that her cult in Athens was distinctive

[24] Georgios Tornikes, *Letter* 7 (pp. 204–219); see, in general, Rhoby (2003) 80–82. I have discussed this letter also in Kaldellis (2007a) 297–298. For its ecclesiastical context, see Angold (1995) 81–82; for the Three Taverns, see Casson (1994) 200.

and unique.[25] This uniqueness can only have been premised on the church of the Theotokos, the Parthenon. And we are about to enter the era of "brand-naming," when the Theotokos of Athens would gain new empire-wide recognition under the label of the Atheniotissa.

The 1154 letter to Bourtzes holds one more point of interest. At the place where Tornikes has to excuse himself for painting contemporary Athens in such dark colors and begins to list everything that it has in its favor, he tells Bourtzes to

> rejoice in that gaiety that is pure and divine and free of all sorrow, and indulge in that divine light which is but an outflow of that pre-eternal light that has come to earth and which "illuminates every man that comes into the world."[26] Compare your condition with what happens in Palestine: draw the parallel between the annual appearance of the divine light there with its continual presence by your side.

The comparison here is to an annual miracle that took place in the Holy Land, attested in other sources (possibly the ancestor of the modern miracle of Holy Fire that occurs on the day before Easter).[27] Bourtzes is encouraged to take pride in the fact that no such miracle is required in Athens because the divine light there is always bright. This is the first reference in the Greek sources to the divine light of Athens, or more specifically to the divine light of the Parthenon (as this is the point in the letter where Tornikes goes on to reject Pallas for the Theotokos). But what it refers *to* exactly is unclear. As we saw in the previous chapter, the pilgrim Saewulf claimed that there was an ever-burning lamp in the Parthenon and the geographer Guido mentioned the divine and inextinguishable light shining in that temple. There is clearly something going on behind all this, but we do not know exactly what. Later twelfth-century sources will offer us variations on this theme, so we should wait to hear what they have to say. There was something in Athens that made possible, in the Parthenon, the worship of the purest divine light.

Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites (1160–1175)

Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites belonged to a family of high officials and courtiers, and before he was appointed bishop of Athens he had led an

[25] Georgios Tornikes, *Letter* 6 (p. 118). He asks Bourtzes to pray to the Parthenos on his behalf also at the end of *Letter* 8 (p. 122).

[26] John 1.9.

[27] E.g., Arethas, *Letter to the Emir of Damaskos* (pp. 240–241); and the sources cited by Darrouzès (1960a) 122.

embassy to Sicily for the emperor Manuel I Komnenos.[28] He was a personal friend of Eustathios, the classical scholar, Homeric commentator, and (later) bishop of Thessalonike. Nikolaos died in Athens, but made provision for his remains to be returned to Constantinople. Along the way he was honored by at least two funeral orations, one by Euthymios Malakes, a native of Thebes and now the bishop of Neopatras (near Lamia), and another by Eustathios at Thessalonike. The two orations offer information about Nikolaos' episcopate in Athens and exemplify the rhetoric and imagery associated with the Byzantine city.

Malakes' is the more conventional of the two orations. I will concentrate on its invocation of the Theotokos and her famous temple, because here again Athens is automatically linked to its divine patron, something that occurs consistently for only two other cities, Thessalonike and to a lesser degree Ephesos, the only pilgrimage sites that could compete with Athens in the provinces. Malakes begins by calling Athens the city of literature, but now with Nikolaos' death its Muse has been silenced. The great name of Athens has been laid low. A first lament is put into the mouth of Nikolaos' brother (a *logothetes*, the emperor's Chief of Staff), who is made to say among other things that it was only because of his brother that Athens both became and was called "the golden" (we found the same motif in the letters attributed to Alexandros of Nikaia and Tornikes). The lament then turns to address Athens' *poliouchos*, its divine patron, the Parthenos and World-Savior. Immediately it mentions her "most famous temple," now left bereft. We note again the instinctive association of Athens with the Parthenos and then immediately with the Parthenon. After praising Nikolaos' virtues, Malakes lists everything that the bishop had done for Athens. For example, he had persuaded secular officials to lighten the tax burden and

> you raised the city up, at a time when it had fallen to its knees ... You improved the ancient Akropolis, the current metropolis of the Athenians, after O so many others had presided over the city from there. You erected houses of God both large and beautiful, and as for that divine Parthenic temple, that proud palace fit for royalty, you made it as beautiful as you could and made it gleam with golden plates, so that both the temple and the sacrificer might shine brightly in the sight of the most pure Parthenos. O that decision was truly divine, by which you were appointed to Athens! For it was necessary, I think, that the city obtain you at that time and no other man, so that in the days after Demosthenes the orator it could have an orator in no wise inferior to Demosthenes to talk to it and fill its ears; and so that in the days after Paul the preacher and teacher of nations it could have a teacher of nations

[28] For Nikolaos' life, see Agapitos (1999) 123–126.

to sit again on the Areopagos and say wise and amazing things; but the greatest thing most worthy of mention is this, that the all-pure bride and Mother of God could find such a pure bridegroom and sacrificer, so that he could bring the offering to her with clean hands and sing the nocturnal hymn with lips from which no filth ever issued.[29]

Nikolaos consummated the virtues of his city, but this was no ordinary city. It had two pasts, two glories, and two sets of virtues: an Akropolis and a metropolis, a Demosthenes and a St. Paul. Athens perfectly symbolized the union of classical learning and Christian piety to which many Komnenian scholars aspired. They felt no compunction about celebrating both sides of their culture, so long as it was the all-pure Parthenos who was honored in the Parthenon; nothing is said here of that other Virgin, Pallas Athena. This vision of Athens is different from that of Tornikes' twenty years earlier, who explicitly dismisses Pallas, and for whom Paul had triumphed over the city of pagan learning rather than complemented its classical glory. But in Malakes Demosthenes orates while Paul preaches. And the language in which he describes the Parthenon constantly harps on the theme of light, modulated by the "gleaming" golden plates and the "shining" of the temple and bishop.

Nikolaos' remains stopped next at Thessalonike, where they were received by Eustathios. Eustathios' funeral oration is an altogether more brilliant production, complex in genre, grand in conception, and dense in allusion, but nothing less could be expected from the greatest orator of the age. It begins with a powerful lament that evokes a multiplicity of images, including some from ancient Athenian topography, to present Nikolaos as the "sun of the priesthood" that has now set. He has departed to join God and the Theometor, as was always his deepest desire. In his final sickness he turned to her, "the queen in Athens," and was finally received by her. Later, Eustathios elaborates the convention of praising the bishop of Athens for restoring literature and philosophy to Athens, which had previously fallen silent but were now revived (how many times, one wonders, could this be done?). This one man, Eustathios claims, was equal to all the ancient glories of the city, the Stoa, the Academy, the Peripatos. "The torch of wisdom shone forth again from there, the sun rose again." Eustathios reflects at length on "a more divine light," being reminded of it by the torch of Nikolaos' wisdom. This "light ever-lasting, ever-burning, and unquenchable," he now calls, as had Tornikes,

[29] Euthymios Malakes, *Funeral Oration for Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* 1–2, 8 (pp. 154–156, 160). For the authorship of this work, see Darrouzès (1965) 158. For Nikolaos' vigils, see also Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Funeral Oration for Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* (*Or.* 14, Wirth), discussed below.

"an outflow of the divine light," and it is found "there," a vague reference in this rhetorical exposition, but probably meaning Athens. That light is worthy of wonder (*thauma*), a phrase that signifies its miraculous nature.

The text is abstract and vague, but it seems that Eustathios has in mind some kind of light in the Parthenon which he exploits to produce a range of images and metaphors, modulating his discussion from that light itself, to its divine source, its reflection in the life and works of the bishop of Athens, and the torch of wisdom that he carried for his once-golden city. For example, after first invoking this mysterious light, Eustathios explains that Nikolaos shone too, to the degree that he abstained from materiality. He took into himself the divine rays of that light and flashed them out brightly to all who saw him. Eustathios continues:

> O Attic light, you are enchambered by the enclosure of masonry [i.e., the Parthenon], but still you illuminate and throw out your fire ... So too did the masonry of our material body and nature enclose this bright archpriest, but the clear light within him flashed out rays that greeted those who looked at him ... Yet now while that eternal light will remain and abide for eternity [the one in the Parthenon or its divine prototype?], the light in us [i.e., in the deceased Nikolaos] has been defeated by our nature; it has been extinguished by the break-up of its bodily chambers [in contrast to the chambers of the Parthenon], to the sorrow of those who beheld it. O for *that* light, which makes Attica famous! O for *this* light, the light of his life and discourse, by which the city of the Athenians received light upon light. The former, if not exactly like "a lamp under a tub,"[30] still, it is hidden under marble slabs and is not manifestly visible; but the latter can be seen as though it were on a peak. That light has departed for a higher place and joined "the father of lights,"[31] while we who had thoroughly enjoyed this man must now wander, as it were, in the dark.[32]

There can be no doubt now, despite the vague and allusive nature of the rhetoric and despite Eustathios' constant switching his point of reference among the different lights shining in – albeit ironically not illuminating – this passage. There *was* some kind of divine light shining within the Parthenon, and this gave Eustathios the opportunity to play on all metaphors and comparisons relating to light, from the brightness of the Attic sky, to the heavenly source of divine light, the miraculous light of the Parthenon, and the torch of Nikolaos' learning. The allusion to Luke suggests that some kind of lamp was involved, which confirms the testimony of Saewulf, as does

[30] Luke 11.33. [31] James 1.17.

[32] Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Funeral Oration for Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* (Wirth pp. 11–12). For an analysis of this work (with no discussion of the lights, however), see Agapitos (1999).

the suggestion that the light of the Parthenon was not visible outside the building but was enclosed within its masonry. But before we conclude this matter, we should wait to hear also what Eustathios' student, the bishop of Athens Michael Choniates, had to say about this light. We might then be able to make better sense of what was going on.

The remainder of this chapter will reconstruct other aspects of religious life in Athens during the twelfth century. Our sources permit us to do this with greater confidence than for any other period. For instance, we know that Athens hosted a major festival in honor of the Theotokos, which must have contributed to her fame abroad. After presenting the evidence for this, I will consider the proof that the Theometor of Athens was gradually being acknowledged in other provinces of the empire as an important part of the Byzantine pantheon of saints. The Theotokos Atheniotissa was something distinctive, in some ways different from the Mother of God adored by Byzantines elsewhere. And as we have seen again and again, what was distinctive about the Atheniotissa was her temple in Athens, and in their name both city and temple bore the trace of an ancient goddess.

Pilgrims and the piety of the Athenians

Our evidence for pilgrims visiting Athens in the twelfth century is different in at least one decisive respect from that for the tenth and eleventh centuries: it tends to concern mostly secular visitors. Few saints' lives were written in the twelfth century, as many writers and bishops rejected the ideals and behaviors that had motivated hagiographic literature in the past.[33] But, as we will see, pilgrimage to the Parthenon continued without break, especially at the local level. In fact, a visit to the Akropolis seems to have been perceived as a religious duty.

Our evidence comes from a memorandum sent by Michael Choniates to the emperor Alexios III Angelos around 1198–1199. This was in the period right before the capture of Constantinople by the knights of the Fourth Crusade, when the administrative, financial, and military infrastructure of the empire was rapidly collapsing. The Byzantine world was falling apart and corrupt officials were trying to grab as much of it as they could for themselves, extorting money and taxes from the provinces. In this memorandum, Choniates complains that the governor (*praitôr*) of the province of

[33] Magdalino (1981) discusses most of the evidence. See also Kaldellis (2007a) 254–255.

Greece and the Peloponnesos, who was normally stationed at Thebes and barred by imperial order from entering Athens under certain circumstances, had violated that restriction by claiming that he wanted to worship at the church of the Mother of God. Once he entered Athens under this pretext, he proceeded to fleece the citizens with taxes, impositions, and surcharges.[34]

In other words, the Parthenon was so important a center of pilgrimage in the late twelfth century that an imperial official could cite his desire to pray there as a legitimate pretext to violate an imperial order. Choniates mentions this pretext three times in his memorandum and never denies that it was a *valid* pretext. This means that pilgrimage to the Parthenon was frequent, a religious opportunity from which a governor might well feel unjustly debarred, even if by an imperial order. And when the emperor sent his wife's brother-in-law, the *Megas Doux* Michael Stryphnos, to set matters straight in 1202–1203, Choniates assumes in his opening address to him that the first order of business was for Stryphnos to enter the Parthenon and behold its wonders.[35] (We will examine his description of those wonders in the next chapter.) Later in the oration Choniates turns to address Stryphnos' wife Theodora. He compares her to the famous women of the past, including Helene, the mother of Constantine the Great:

She follows in the footsteps of Helene, that most blessed one among queens and most fortunate in her offspring, who gave birth to the greatest emperor Constantine. Just as she had traveled to Palestine and performed the miracles that are ascribed to her [i.e., finding the True Cross], so too has this woman now come to behold the delightfulness of the Parthenos, to visit her holy temple, to be filled with the flashes that illuminate it, to "delight in the Lord and to accept from Him what her own heart has requested."[36] And a queen of the south traveled to Judaea because she loved the wisdom of Solomon,[37] but this one here is in love with greater things than Solomonic wisdom and seeks to trade for the precious pearl.[38] From Byzantion she traveled to Athens, she flew through the intervening space and the obstacles on the way, rivers wide enough to carry ships and over rough mountain paths.[39]

[34] Michael Choniates, *Memorandum to Alexios III Angelos* (pp. 284–285, with commentary on 287–305); for a loose modern Greek translation with commentary, see Dendrinos (1991–1992). For the context, see Brand (1968) 149–152; and Herrin (1975) esp. 259–260, 266–270. *Pace* Thallon (1973) 3 and Setton (1975b) III 193, Choniates does not say that the governor plundered the Parthenon in *Letter* 63.3 (p. 85): the article goes with *polis*, not the church. The same events are discussed in *Letter* 65 (pp. 87–89).

[35] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* Megas Doux *Stryphnos* 4 (v. I, p. 325). For Stryphnos, see Kolovou (1999) 162 n. 535.

[36] Psalm 37.4. [37] The queen of Saba: 3 Kings (1 Kings) 10.1-13. [38] Matthew 13.45-46.

[39] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* Megas Doux *Stryphnos* 4–5, 21–22 (v. I, pp. 325–326, 332–333).

Choniates would have it that Theodora came all the way from Constantinople, braving the dangers and discomfort of the road, just to visit the Parthenon. By comparing her to Helene he indirectly compares his cathedral to the True Cross and Athens to the Holy Land. In a previous address to the governor of Greece Nikephoros Prosouchos (ca. 1182), Choniates had likewise pretended that Nikephoros had rushed past all the other cities on his way out of a burning love and desire to visit and see the temple of "the light-receiving and light-giving Parthenos Mother of God."[40] The truth of the matter in either case is less important than the fact that the bishop of Athens, in a public address, could make such a claim on behalf of his cathedral and expect to be taken seriously by the lords and ladies who visited from Constantinople. They would certainly not contradict him publicly, in any case. This presumption again demonstrates the widespread and continued popularity of pilgrimage to the Parthenon in twelfth-century Greece, for only that could make Choniates' rhetoric credible. Of course, given the brilliant splendor of what they subsequently saw inside, Stryphnos and Prosouchos might have come to believe it themselves afterwards (both addresses refer to the mysterious light).

All of our texts have so far recorded the impressions of non-Athenians or were addressed to visitors. What of the piety of the Athenians themselves? An amusing text with which to extend our discussion of religious life in twelfth-century Athens is a passage in another oration by Eustathios of Thessalonike. In 1177 or 1178, he expressed his annoyance at his flock because they had not come to church in sufficient numbers the day before. "Divine service was offered, the clergy were here, the hymn to God was chanted, prayers sent up, but it was all thin, coming from too few mouths." He claims that he was terribly embarrassed, as two friends were visiting at the time, one from Constantinople and the other from Athens, who compared the paltry attendance to that in their cities, where no one stayed at home. This was no true *panêgyris* said the one, no "assembly of all." Then the other, "whose native land was Athens," laid into him, comparing the two cities. In Athens, he boasted, no one stayed home, not even the children. Are we going to take this from them, Eustathios asks? How can Athens, "so old and now only a shadow of its ancient blessedness," compete with Thessalonike, a Christian city in the flowering of its bloom?[41]

[40] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* praitôr *Nikephoros Prosouchos, when he arrived at Athens* 19–21 (v. I, pp. 148–149).

[41] Eustathios of Thessalonike, *He is aggrieved that the people did not come to prayer* (Wirth pp. 57–58); for the date and argument, see Magdalino (1996) 229–230.

This is the third time we have heard of the great piety of the Athenians – the others were in the *vita* of Nikon and Theodoros Prodromos' *vita* of Meletios the Younger – and it is time to cut it down to size. Is it plausible that the Athenians were in fact the most pious among the Byzantines, at least from the mid ninth to the late twelfth century? This has in its favor the fact that the three texts in which the claim is made are independent of each other. On the other hand, none of the three authors had ever been to Athens. Nikon's biographer places the Parthenon in the Peiraieus, and Eustathios' Athenian friend is clearly making a tendentious argument. So is Eustathios, by the way. Byzantine preachers regularly compared their congregations unfavorably to outsiders – whether other Christians, pagans, or heretics – in order to exhort them to be more pious or pay more attention. The Athenians, it turns out, were not any different, at least according to Choniates, our only informant with first-hand knowledge. He too complained that his flock did not like to come to church but proffered inventive excuses, nor did they pay attention to his sermons. In one sermon, he even says that the Kelts (Frenchmen), Germans, and Italians, those barbarians, kept more proper decorum in church than the Greeks! These, it seems, were problems that bishops faced always and everywhere, and all, including Choniates, tried to shame their congregations by praising the good habits of others.[42]

This leaves the praise of the Athenians' piety by Nikon's biographer and by Prodromos. If we look more closely at their accounts, however, we may begin to suspect that this piety is largely an inference made by these authors from the fact that the Athenians had a famous Christian church, namely the Parthenon. The Athenians used to be infamous for their devotion to idols, but to congregate in such a great temple to the Mother of God they must now have reversed their habits entirely, being as pious now as they were idolatrous before. In short, the fame of the Parthenon throughout the Byzantine world (and beyond) translated into a higher estimation for the Athenians themselves. This, if we may step back for a moment, was the second of the great ironic reversals in Athenian history. The first was when the city that put Sokrates to death identified itself in later times as a city of philosophers and flourished under Rome in large part because of its prestige in philosophy. The second was this, that the center of pagan philosophy and the most idolatrous city in the later empire became famous for its

[42] Michael Choniates, *Catechetical Oration* 1.26-29 (v. I, p. 117); see also Protheôria *to the Present Book* 4 (p. 4); *Oration given when he was at the Euboian Euripos* 10 (p. 183) on the order kept by westerners in church; and *Homily on Why Man is a Composite Being* 21 (p. 195). For this rhetorical strategy in Byzantium, see the sources cited in Kaldellis (2007b), to which more may be added.

Christian piety and visited from all over because of its famous Christian shrine, in fact the converted temple of its former patron goddess. There was something brazen about both of these transformations, and that perhaps explains their astonishing success. Half-measures and defensive apologies would never do. In the eyes of some, Athens had become the most Christian city in the empire and had usurped the place of Constantinople as the preeminent city dedicated to the Theotokos.

The festival of the Atheniotissa

All Byzantine towns and even villages had regular fairs (*panêgyreis*), in which a marketplace would be temporarily set up and attended by buyers and sellers from far and near. Some of these festivals seem to have had a truly international scope. They were usually held on the festival day of the most important local saint and involved all manner of celebrations, celebrities, and entertainments. We happen to possess a valuable description of the annual festival in honor of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike from the very period that interests us here. It forms part of an intelligent and subversive satire called the *Timarion* and dates to the early years of the twelfth century. There is no reason to analyze here the entirety of this subtle text, which involves a journey to the underworld and discussion of philosophical, religious, and other contemporary social issues. What interests us chiefly is its description of the festival, the most important one in northern Greece, which attracted visitors from as far as Italy and Bulgaria. The protagonist, Timarion, climbed upon a hill to get a good look. He saw the merchants' booths facing each other in long parallel lines, with smaller rows projecting outward at an angle, like the feet of a centipede. All manner of products were on display from many places, including Greece, Syria, Egypt, Spain, and the Black Sea (the latter brought overland by mules from Constantinople). The place was full of animals and the cacophony of their noises. The divine service was held during three all-night vigils, with priests and monks continually chanting the hymn in honor of the saint by torchlight. The city's archbishop presided over the festival. When the governor arrived, the crowd assembled to greet him and gawk at his impressive retinue. His first order of business was to pay his respects to the martyr, while the crowd cheered on. Timarion then returned to his hired lodgings, where he fell sick and, eventually, died (but that is another story).[43]

[43] *Timarion* 114–292 (pp. 53–60). For a study, see Kaldellis (2007a) 276–283. For *panêgyreis* in Byzantium, see Vryonis (1997); Lambropoulou (1989).

Did Athens host an annual festival like this? We have two unambiguous statements that it did, plus one that is less clear. In a letter to Michael Choniates, Euthymios Malakes (who had delivered one of two funeral orations in honor of Choniates' predecessor, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites) refers casually to the time of year when "the universal festival (*pankosmios panêgyris*) of the Theometor gathers peoples from every place to Athens."[44] Also, one of Choniates' nephews wrote a lament upon his uncle's death in 1222 listing all the things that he had enjoyed in Athens before going into exile upon the arrival of the Latins in 1205:

> I mean a splendid and famous city (even though now it is more of a great and splendid ruin or rather a shadow of a true city and a field of sorrows, moved only by the winds, and these too are often destructive and harmful); a most famous temple and heavenly chamber and Parthenon of the Theometor; a most capable clergy; frequent celebrations; synods and *panêgyreis* composed of multitudes; fields, pasturages, and all the other good things; in a word, all good secular and Christian things.[45]

This festival would naturally have been held on August 15 (we note again the emphasis on the temple of the Theometor in this account of Athens' advantages).

There is one more text that attests a *panêgyris* at Byzantine Athens, though depending on the context the word can alternatively mean an assembly and need not refer to a festival of the kind described in the *Timarion*. This is a letter written by a member of the Makrembolites family to the bishop of the city, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites. The latter was absent from the city, in the capital on business at the court, but had sent a letter to Makrembolites in Athens. The prose of the latter's response is vague and complex, and many of the allusions would be clearer if we knew the circumstances better and did not have to infer them from the text. Makrembolites seems to be saying that he is in Athens again for three days to offer thanks to the Mother of God for saving him from the gates of Hades. It is not clear whether he had traveled to Athens for this specific purpose, which would mean that the shrine was believed to offer healing, or whether he was already there when he fell sick and recovered. He is pleased to hear that the bishop is making progress in the capital on whatever business kept him there: "I rejoice along with the rest of the city in the world-saving *panêgyris* and offer thanksgiving up to the Theometor." It is possible that

[44] Euthymios Malakes, *Letter to Michael Choniates* (Papadopoulos-Kerameus p. 95; Bonis p. 72).
[45] Anonymous (nephew), *Monodia for Michael Choniates* 5 (p. 241).

the *panêgyris* refers here simply to the whole citizen body, or to the clergy, who are happy at the news that their bishop has sent them. It is conceivable that this news sent them up to the Parthenon to offer thanks to the Mother of God. But Makrembolites would probably not have referred to such a gathering as a "world-saving *panêgyris*." The latter expression seems more appropriate for a regular festival in honor of the Theometor that happened to be taking place when Makrembolites was in town and Nikolaos' letter arrived.[46]

At any rate, the great interest shown by Tornikes, Eustathios, Malakes, and Makrembolites in the Theotokos of Athens, combined with the activities of the city's learned bishops in this same period, prove how famous and respected the shrine was in the Byzantine world of the twelfth century. Granted, we are dealing here with the empire's literate elite, but in their capacities as teachers, bishops, and social patrons they surely influenced the choices of more average Byzantines regarding where to travel in search of religious succor, sightseeing, business, and fun. Athens had a famous temple that featured some kind of divine light and a popular festival. And, as we will see below, the city's ruins were also a source of attraction, at least for some.

What more can we say about the festival? The details must be supplied from festivals attested in other parts of the Byzantine world. Timarion, as we saw, hired lodgings, so the flood of visitors must have benefited anyone with a few spare rooms to let.[47] The fairs were of obvious economic importance for all involved, especially the host city, though unfortunately we have no evidence for this aspect in Athens.[48] Our most detailed and colorful evidence comes from late antiquity. In the collection of the miracles of St. Thekla (fifth century), it is reported that once, on the last day of the festival, some visitors to the shrine were eating together and telling each other what they had liked best: one liked the splendor, another the multitude of people, a third the assembly of archpriests, or the refinement of the speakers, the harmony of the psalms, the duration of the all-night vigil, the order of the ceremonies, the intensity of those who were praying, the press of the crowd, and so on. But one man said that although others may like what they will, *he* saw the most beautiful girl under one of the colonnades, and he prayed to the saint that he might possess her (this got him into trouble with the saint later).[49] Secular and sacred interests jostled together.

[46] Makrembolites, *Letter to Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* (pp. 247–248). For the Makrembolites family in the twelfth century, see Hunger (1998), though without discussing this letter.

[47] For accommodations, see Dimitroukas (1997), v. I, 114–129.

[48] In general, see Foss (2002) 145–146; Horden and Purcell (2000) 432–434.

[49] *Miracles of Thekla* 33 (pp. 376–381). This was a common problem: Ando (1996) 201–202.

21 Digenes plate from the agora; from Frantz (1961): "a song described how Digenes slew a dragon by means of five arrows. Here the artist, or potter, has taken pains to make the scene unmistakable by clearly indicating the five arrows in the neck." Image used by permission of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations.

The Fathers of the Church complained that pilgrims viewed festivals as theatrical performances, and there was all too much drunkenness, prostitution, and other lewd acts, like dancing by women. Even monks were known to engage in business at these festivals, and we know that by the middle Byzantine period some monasteries had become commercial establishments.[50] In the case of twelfth-century Athens, we should probably add to this list of secular attractions singers who performed the epic ballads of Digenes Akritis, the rugged frontiersman who seduced young women, fought beasts and rivals, and built palaces on the Euphrates. In the early tenth century, Arethas, bishop of Kaisareia in Kappadokia, claimed that there were in his time wandering minstrels who would sing about the heroes of old in exchange for money. And glazed plates have been found from twelfth-century Athens that depict scenes from the battles of Digenes (Fig. 21).[51]

[50] Fathers: Vryonis (1997) 264–266; Bitton-Ashkelony (2005) 37–39. Monasteries: Morris (1995).

[51] For Arethas, see Beaton (1996) 44; for the bowls, Frantz (1961) figs. 31–33; Dark (2001) 99, citing previous scholarship.

To conclude, major festivals developed at particular places because those places had some distinctive feature, perhaps geographical or strategic, or because they were urban centers serving a larger region, or because an annual miracle took place there.[52] In the case of Athens, there is only one thing that stands out in all the sources about the city and which is in fact mentioned in all references that we have to the festival: the festival was in honor of the Theometor, the Theotokos Atheniotissa who was honored in the Parthenon. This was yet another blessing that the building bestowed upon the medieval city, to be added to the reputation of its citizens for piety, which was by itself no small advantage, given the pagan past and associations of Athens in the medieval imagination.

Brand-naming and exporting the Atheniotissa

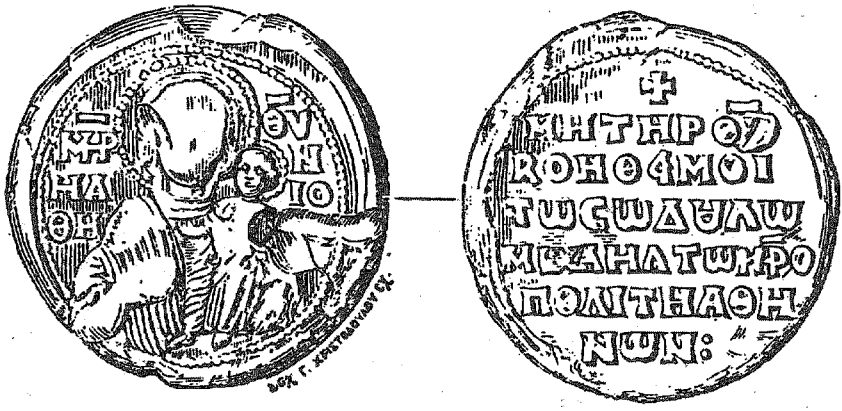
Nothing declares success more powerfully than a recognizable brand name, and medieval pilgrimage sites knew some of the rules of modern advertising. The Mother of God was worshiped throughout the Byzantine world, but, as we have seen, there was something distinctive about the Theotokos Atheniotissa that had to do with her shrine at Athens. The emergence of a special name for her cult indicates the rapid growth of its fame and recognition throughout the empire (and beyond) as a distinctive place of worship.

Starting in the late seventh century, the seals of the bishops of Athens invoke the aid of the Theotokos on the reverse.[53] But this was common for the seals of both churchmen and secular officials. In the twelfth century, however, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites was the first to put on his seal the legend *Meter theou he Athenaïs* – the *Athenian* Mother of God. His successor Choniates had the legend *Meter theou he Atheniotissa.*[54] At a time when these bishops were being lauded by their Constantinopolitan friends for the fame of their see; when the local festival had become a major regional event; while the stream of pilgrims continued to pour in; and when the cult of the Atheniotissa was spreading to regions far from Athens, the home shrine was understandably believed to deserve the distinctive recognition of a brand-label. This development seems to have involved a change in iconography. So far depicted on seals according to the Blacherniotissa type,

[52] Cf. the miracle at the shrine of St. Tryphon: Foss (1996) 105–106.

[53] Laurent (1963) 437–453 (nos. 585–607).

[54] Laurent (1963) 451–452 (no. 605) and 453 (no. 607); also in Oikonomides (1986) 114–115 (no. 120). See Schlumberger (1900) 404; Setton (1975b) III 197 n. 6.



22 Michael Choniates' *Mother of God the Atheniotissa* seal (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens; drawing by G. Christodoulou). The reverse side reads: *Mother of God, help me, your servant, Michael, Metropolitan of Athens.*

with the medallion of Christ on her breast, she now holds the infant Jesus with her left arm and has her right arm on her breast (Fig. 22). It is unclear whether this change accompanied the new name or was produced by independently evolving artistic variations. But what had been implicit for so long was now out in the open, for "the power of the site is carried by way of the name."[55]

Let us consider the evidence for the spread of the fame of the Atheniotissa in the Orthodox world. This is scattered and sometimes difficult to date precisely but its significance has not yet been appreciated.

A brief text in a collection published over a hundred years ago appears to be a powerful prayer that begs the Lord to heal a certain Maria from fever (or this very common name may here be generic, to be replaced with the name of any person for whom the prayer, like a recipe, is used). It lists other healing miracles that God has performed and then calls on the saints individually for help: saint Therapon from Smyrne, saint Parthenios from Lampsakos, saint Ioulianos from Kaisareia, and so on for almost a page. The text also invokes the "holy Lady, Mother of God from Athens." Given the effort that the writer of this text has exerted to be comprehensive and to invoke the most powerful saintly agents known to him, it is significant that the Atheniotissa is the only Theotokos whom he lists. The text then becomes darker and proceeds to exorcise any evil spirits who may be seeking to cause "Maria" harm (and all varieties of harm are carefully listed

[55] Weyl Carr (2002) 85; see 78 ff. for the type-names.

for good measure, as in magical spells).[56] Unfortunately, the text cannot be precisely dated.

Before 1186, a monk named Ioannikios founded a monastery in the province of Mylasa and Melanoudion (in southwestern Asia Minor) that he dedicated to the Theotokos, "the one who is honored in Athens." In August of 1186, he obtained some financial exemptions for this monastery from the emperor Isaakios II Angelos, which is how we know about it. Was Ioannikios an Athenian, or one whose pilgrimage to Athens had impressed upon him the power of the Atheniotissa?[57] We know from letters of Choniates that in the early thirteenth century the abbot of the monastery of St. Meletios the Younger, in the hills between Attica and Boiotia, was named Ioannikios (we examined Meletios' visit to Athens in the previous chapter). This monastery remained in Orthodox hands during the period of Latin rule. The letters in question date to the period of Choniates' exile, after 1205. Can this be the same monk, a monastic founder in Asia Minor turned abbot in Attica?[58] He and Choniates seem to have been on good terms. We can imagine a collaboration between the two in founding a monastery in Asia Minor dedicated to the Atheniotissa. Surely the bishop of Athens would have taken note of that event, even if the two monks were not the same man.

This is not the only church of the Atheniotissa attested outside of Athens in this period. In the later thirteenth century, after the restoration of the empire to Constantinople, the high official Michael Doukas Glabas Tarchaniotes founded a monastery in honor of the Theometor Atheniotissa in the capital. It is attested in only one manuscript, a paraphrase of the *History* of Georgios Pachymeres,[59] and unfortunately we have no other information about it. This monastery was built when Athens itself was under Latin rule.

We come now to one of the most extraordinary proofs for the diffusion of the cult's fame. A patriarchal document of 1364 attests that the metropolis of Soterioupolis in "Alania" was dedicated to the Theotokos Atheniotissa. Alania was a geographical term used vaguely by the Byzantines. Technically it meant the lands inhabited by the Alans (wherever they lived, usually north of the Caucasus) but in practice it could refer to most of the lands east of the

[56] The text is in Vassiliev (1893) 323–327, here 325. For a proper exorcism, with commentary, see Delatte (1957).

[57] The text is in Miklosich and Müller (1890) 121–122 (no. 32); see Dölger (1925) 91–92 (no. 1571). Cf. Janin (1975) 318 n. 5, 324.

[58] Michael Choniates, *Letters* 93, 96, 133, 157, 161, 178 (pp. 121–122, 128, 219–220, 252–253, 257, 283–284); see Kolovou (1999) 100–102.

[59] The text is in Failler (2002) 68; see Kidonopoulos (1994) 67–68; Papamastorakis (2003b) 601.

Black Sea. Soterioupolis ("Savior Town") is attested as an autonomous archbishopric from the tenth century on, though during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it was intermittently combined with and then separated from the metropolis of "Alania." The exact location of Soterioupolis remains unclear, though various possibilities have been proposed. In the mid tenth century, Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos tells us that it was on the border with Abasgia. The most recent study identifies it with Borçka (in Turkey, near the Georgian border).[60]

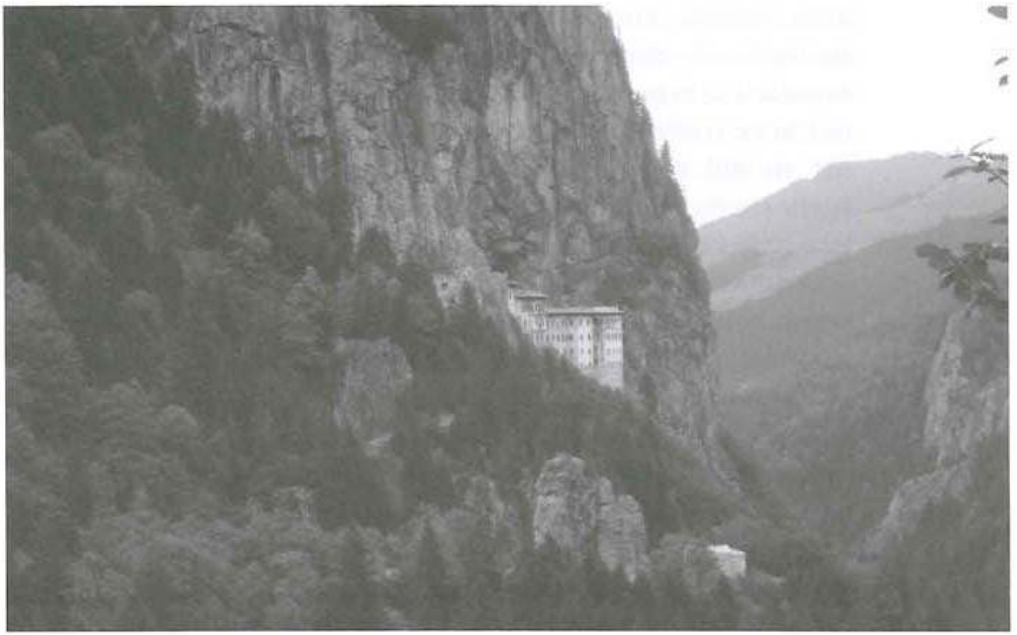
We do not know when the church of Soterioupolis was dedicated to the Atheniotissa, though it is difficult to believe that this happened as early as the tenth century. However, the Theotokos of Athens was already famous enough in nearby Kappadokia in the eighth century to motivate Stephanos, later the bishop of Sougdaia, to go on a pilgrimage there (and Sougdaia, in the Crimea, could also be deemed a part of "Alania" by the Byzantines). Must we then imagine another Athenian, bringing the patroness of his city to this remote part of his world at a later date?[61] What is curious is that there are two more Athenian associations in the vicinity of Borçka. The first is minor but bizarre. On the Pontic coast, roughly halfway between Trebizond and Phasis, there was a village named Athens, just as the one in Attica. It was noted by writers of the early imperial era; Prokopios, in the sixth century, says that its name came not from any Athenian settlers but from a local ruler named Athenaia, whose tomb could still be seen in his time. It has been proposed that the name may be of local derivation, meaning "a place with shade."[62] This name, in various forms, has apparently been in continuous use, though the place has recently been renamed Pazar. It is only about 70 km from Borçka, the possible site of Soterioupolis.

There is another connection. Just 40 km south of the nearby coastal city of Trebizond, the capital of an independent Byzantine state for centuries after 1204, there perched on the face of a cliff the monastery of the Panagia of Soumela, in a most un-Attic setting (Fig. 23). This monastery was the chief pilgrimage site for Christians of the Pontos (around the northeastern coast of Asia Minor, on the Black Sea), under the regime of the Grand Komnenoi at Trebizond and later under the Ottomans. Its chief attraction was an icon

[60] Document: Miklosich and Müller (1860) 477–478; location: Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 42.109–110 (pp. 188–189). For a review, see Bryer and Winfield (1985) v. I, 347–351.

[61] So Janin (1975) 275 n. 3.

[62] Prokopios, *Wars* 8.2.10 (mentioned also in 2.29.22, 2.30.14); Bryer and Winfield (1985) v. I, 335–336, 339, citing previous literature; Braund (1994) 181.



23 Soumela monastery in Pontos, Turkey (photo by Dr. Alam Payind, Director of the Middle East Studies Center, The Ohio State University).

of the Panagia. (Soumela has been abandoned since the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1923.)

What is interesting from the Athenian point of view about Soumela is the story that has been told regarding the origin of its icon, which was first put into print in the eighteenth century in a collaborative effort between Parthenios Metaxopoulos, the abbot of the monastery who was then writing a history of Trebizond, and Neophytos Kausokalybites, a resident of Bucharest. The story that they told was set between the first and the fourth centuries AD. As the reader may recall, St. Luke the Evangelist died in Thebes and had with him an image of the Theotokos he had painted with his own hands. This icon was then taken to Athens by one of Luke's disciples named Ananias and placed in a church erected in its honor, which was named Athenaia, after the icon (i.e., the Theotokos Athenaia). During the reign of Theodosius I (so in the late fourth century), the Panagia appeared to two Athenians named Basileios and Soterichos and charged them with taking the icon to the Pontos. This they did, after being tonsured under the names Barnabas and Sophronios (monastic names commonly began with the same letter as one's baptismal name). Along the way they visited many monasteries that would not in fact be founded until many centuries later, and met many saints who actually lived in the ninth and

tenth centuries. Their story is essentially a romance travel-narrative for monks. Finally, they founded the monastery that came to be known as Soumela. But even this early account about its origin admits that the place had to be resettled later. The icon survived the hard times and in fact survives still, though it is blackened. It is housed in a chapel built by Pontic Greeks near Kastania, Verria, in northern Greece, after their resettlement in 1923.

The story of the Theotokos Athenaia contains obvious anachronisms and cannot be taken at face value. What interests us, however, is not whether it is true but when it was first composed, because that would tell us when it was held to be prestigious to possess an icon of the Theotokos from Athens, especially in a place as remote as Pontos. Metaxopoulos and Kausokalybites cite a number of texts in their notes, all but one of which are supposed to have since disappeared (this should put us on the alert). But a close comparison has revealed that this one text, which has survived, can account for the vast majority of their narrative. That text is a long *vita* of Soumela's two founders written by a certain Akakios Sabbaïtes. It survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript on Mt. Athos. Amazingly, it has not yet been published, but one philologist who has studied it carefully, Odysseas Lampsidis, has shown that Akakios matured during the second half of the twelfth century and wrote in the first half of the thirteenth, in other words in exactly the period of the apogee of the Atheniotissa cult. In the preface, Akakios admits that nothing was known about the founders of the monastery, but his fellow monks wanted to know about them nonetheless so he wrote the story that we have.[63]

Akakios certainly proved capable of writing inventive narratives, but perhaps we should not attribute to him alone the Athenian origin of the icon. The tradition may have come into being no earlier than the period of Iconoclasm in the eighth century, when the belief in icons painted by St. Luke was promoted by the defenders of images,[64] and also no earlier than whatever time the Theotokos at Athens became popular throughout the empire, for the tale casts the icon of Soumela as the prototype of the

[63] The basic facts about Akakios are in Lampsidis (1974) 304–319 and (2004a) 67–71. The first publication of the foundation story was by Neophytos Kausokalybites in Parthenios Metaxopoulos' *History of the City of Trebizond* (Leipzig: W. G. Sommer, 1775). The full Greek title of this volume, which I have been unable to find, is half a page long; see Papadopoulos-Bretos (1854) 95–96. For an uncritical summary (and inaccurate on the location of the icon before its peregrinations), see Kyriakides (1898) 25–51; for a more accurate summary, Lampsidis (1956); for Soumela, Janin (1975) 274–276; Meinardus (1970–1971b); and Bryer and Winfield (1985) v. I, 254–255, who believe the tradition may go as far back as the tenth century.

[64] Pentcheva (2006) 48, 124, and 230 n. 53, citing previous bibliography.

Atheniotissa, drawing its prestige from Athens. On the other hand, the link to Athens was probably in place before 1204, when the city was effectively lost to Orthodoxy and Soumela's star rose under the Grand Komnenoi of Trebizond. We cannot say exactly when the tradition originated between these points, nor need we shift through all its layers and accretions. The story was elaborated later, as Akakios admits before fleshing out the journey of the two monks like a historical novel, and nice authenticating touches were added, for example by making Barnabas date his will by the Attic month Boedromion! Be that as it may, what this story tells us is that at some point before 1204 a monastery in Pontos felt that it could enhance its prestige by tracing the history of its icon to Athens. Perhaps it was the latter's capture by the Latins that prompted the Pontians to lay claim to its legacy in this way. And its swift rise to popularity may have likewise inspired the dedication of the metropolis of nearby Soterioupolis to the Atheniotissa as well.

Yet one problem remains. In 1395, during the brief period of Venetian rule over Athens (1394–1403), the Italian notary Niccolò da Martoni visited Athens and wrote a detailed account of what he saw. One thing that he says concerns the present discussion. Among the relics that he claims were kept in the Parthenon, he includes an icon of the Virgin Maria painted by St. Luke the Evangelist.[65] How is this possible? It is impossible to believe that the Parthenon housed such a prestigious icon during the Byzantine period, i.e., before 1204, and that it left no trace in the extensive record that we have. It is more likely that this object was added to the Parthenon inventory in the two centuries before Niccolò's visit, that is during the Latin period, along with all the other relics that he lists, none of which are attested for the Byzantine period. Before 1204, all we hear about is the divine light. In other words, an icon of the Virgin painted by St. Luke was added to the Parthenon at precisely the time when that icon was making Soumela famous in the east. We are on shaky ground here, but it is possible that the custodians of the Parthenon (whether Latin or Greek) were inspired by the story of Soumela to add such an icon to their inventory, in effect denying the historicity of the travels of Basileios and Soterichos, but at the same time exploiting the story circulating about them in the East to promote an icon similar to the one they were supposed to have taken to the Pontos.

Perhaps it is better not to pry further into this. What we can say is that these wandering icons of the Athenaia, frontier towns dedicated to the cult of the Atheniotissa, monasteries founded in her name and honor in Asia

[65] Le Grand (1895) 652; for Martoni, see Setton (1948) 227–232.

Minor and Constantinople, and exorcisms invoking her help, prove that the Athenian cult of the Theotokos was not only known outside its home base but also institutionally established. The brand-name became a religious franchise. There were few cults in the Byzantine empire to which this happened; Athens was among the most important of them. And when all is said and done, everything leads us back to the Parthenon. All our sources point to it as being not merely the flagship of the Theotokos cult but the very reason for its existence. There was something about the Parthenon that gave rise to all of this. Before we ask what that was, we will take a close look at one of the temple's greatest lovers, Michael Choniates, the last Orthodox bishop of Byzantine Athens. The church was his sole consolation in a town that he perceived as decrepit in comparison to its classical glory and in a time when his own Byzantine world was likewise collapsing into ruin all about him.

6 | Michael Choniates: a classicist-bishop and his cathedral (AD 1182–1205)

The Parthenon as consolation

Michael Choniates was the last bishop of Byzantine Athens. He was from the city of Chonai in Asia Minor (classical Kolossai) and had traveled to Constantinople to perfect his education. He there studied under the greatest scholar of the age, the Homeric commentator and court orator Eustathios (who later became bishop of Thessalonike). Michael was joined in Constantinople by his brother Niketas, who eventually became a high official in the capital before the fall of the City and the main historian of Byzantium for the years 1118–1207. Michael was appointed bishop of Athens in 1182 and held that office until early in 1205, when the Latin conquerors arrived, fresh from the ruin of Constantinople. He lived in exile for another two decades, mostly on the island of Keos (modern Kea/Tzia, within sight of Attica), maintaining a correspondence with friends in Greece and Asia Minor.[1]

When Choniates arrived in Athens, at the age of about 50, his Christian faith was infused with the ideals of classical antiquity, philosophical and moral. Because of his classical training, he had idealized Athens in his mind and was unprepared for what he found. For him, the modern city was a ruin, redeemed in comparison to classical antiquity only by its faith, which the ancients had not known; but he also knew that his own Roman nation, while Christian, paled in crucial ways in comparison to the ancient Greeks. His letters and orations are the only works we have from the hand of a Byzantine bishop of Athens. He cared for his flock, did all in his power to improve their material and spiritual circumstances, and loved, if not the actual city itself, at least the idea of that city. Yet the one thing he loved most about it he was fortunate to possess fully, and this was the Parthenon, his cathedral, which brought together into one place his faith and the ancient virtues he so admired, the best of both worlds. The monument was a conduit between the two poles of Choniates' moral existence, the Hellenic and the Christian.

[1] For recent treatments of Choniates in general, see Pavan (1983) 46–53; Kolovou (1999); Breitenbach (2003) c. 5; Rhoby (2003) 24–72; Kaldellis (2007a) 317–334, citing previous literature.

When all else failed, he could and did take solace in its eternal glory. Here is a typical passage, from a letter to his friend, Euthymios Malakes, the bishop of New Patrai (ca. 1185). Choniates expresses the present misery of the city largely in Scriptural terms and contrasts it throughout to the city's classical past. We note also a hint toward the end of the always elusive flame that illuminated the Parthenon.

How could we deem life livable, we who are appointed to live in this vale of tears?[2] The majesty of this once noble city is now only a name, in fact a ruin, and the once fertile earth of reason and literature is a ground of tears and groans. Time and envy have managed to crush it so far that it has been deprived of its former manliness, literature, and the rest of virtue. Good things have been uprooted from the earth itself and all of Attica has become a "field of devastation."[3] Gardens lack rivers, orchards lack fountains, Kallirrhoe has no stream,[4] Mt. Hymettos no bee-hives, and flocks have no grass. This sky is of bronze, this earth of iron;[5] such wages do sinners receive from God. We have no rain at all, as though we had set up our dwellings in the torrid zone; one could even call us dessicated. The once golden zone is no longer golden nor does it girdle the Athenians with mirth, as it is not blessed with verdancy but has become dry and squeezes these poor men with sorrow, allowing no liquid balm[6] to drip down. As for Marathon and Eleusis, the former has ceased to produce wheat just as it has surrendered its ancient trophies, while an intense famine has taken over the land; the latter has become unspeakable and full of deep silence in a new way,[7] as pirates attack it and lead their captives to the inner chambers of Hades and initiate them in the mysteries of death ... There is one consolation in all this and one cause for cheer alone, namely the grace that permeates and illuminates the temple of the Mother of God. I liken this to a pillar of fire; a cloud guiding me through the wilderness;[8] and, as David says, "a tent that hides me in the day of my evils";[9] a commanding point of divine vision that makes clear the miracle of the burning bush;[10] and, greatest of all, the Akropolis of heaven that lifts up to the third heaven[11] the one who is afraid to ascend.[12]

Long before the classical nostalgias of modernity, the Parthenon had acquired a personal and existential meaning for Choniates. Likewise, in the address to the governor of Greece Demetrios Drimys (ca. 1184), he laments the state of Athens and contrasts it to its ancient glories:

[2] I.e., Athens; cf. Psalm 84.7. [3] Joel 2.3, 3.19.
[4] Thucydides, *History* 2.15.5; Kallirrhoe means that which "flows well."
[5] Deuteronomy 28.23. [6] Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 23.281; *Odyssey* 6.79.
[7] Referring to the oath of silence regarding the ancient mysteries.
[8] Exodus 13.21; Numbers 14.14. [9] Psalm 27.5. [10] Exodus 3.2. [11] 2 Corinthians 12.2.
[12] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 20.2–5 (p. 24). For his complaints about Athens, see Kolovou (1999) 232–236; Rhoby (2003) 38–69; cf. 73-76 for his correspondence with Malakes.

Yes, truly, I am not a happy pastor, tending a miserable and small flock as I do in this city, which used to be great but is now a great wasteland. And when I sit on this rock [i.e., the Akropolis] and sing, I sing only to myself, as no one answers, except the echo, responding brilliantly to my pastoral tunes. Indeed, I have been in danger of becoming boorish from the moment I was appointed to live in sage Athens.[13]

The "rock" was his only consolation. Choniates seems to have communed with the mute ruins of antiquity, which could only echo his own voice. In his depressed state, he found consolation in the Parthenon and the Akropolis. The modernity of his response may occlude how odd it was in its Byzantine context. Byzantines did not normally react to buildings in this way. Though rhetorical in their way, Choniates' letters reveal a deeper personal level than do *ekphraseis* of Byzantine monuments, which were mostly commissioned and performative pieces. His turn to the Parthenon was entirely unsolicited. What is fascinating in these passages, moreover, is that he did not turn for solace to the Theotokos herself but rather to her cathedral. Did she too not answer his songs? Curiously, Choniates seems to have derived less consolation from his faith than he sometimes implied. His stance was different from the more strident Christian rhetoric of Tornikes. In writing to bishop Bourtzes, as we saw, Tornikes lamented the ruin of the city on the one hand but felt that its Christian qualities more than made up for its loss of classical virtue. Of course, Tornikes was not present in Athens, so we cannot know whether classical nostalgia would have seized him too at the sight of all those ruins.

On other occasions, especially when there was no drought, Choniates could be more positive about Athens, as in this letter to Michael Autoreianos a year or two earlier. What remained constant in his correspondence and orations was the superlative tone in which he spoke of the Akropolis:

On the other hand, there is that wise saying of Ecclesiastes. One generation comes and another goes, but the earth abides forever.[14] The grace of this land is the same; it is temperate, bears fruit well, indeed bears everything. There is honey-sweetened Hymettos, the calm waters of the Peiraieus, Eleusis of the Mysteries, the plain of Marathon, so fit for horsemanship; and then there is this Akropolis upon which I now sit and believe that I tread upon the corner of heaven itself. But that old generation that loved reason and enjoyed a superfluity of wisdom has now passed and been replaced by another that is boorish, poor in mind and poor in body.[15]

[13] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* praitôr *Demetrios Drimys* 3 (v. I, pp. 158–159).
[14] Ecclesiastes 1.4. [15] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 8.3 (p. 12).

His estimation of the land varied, then, depending on the weather, even if the people, his flock, would always remain vastly inferior to their ancestors in his eyes. Everything that always and still was good about Athens was located on the Akropolis, and his trail of allusions and comparisons constantly led there: from the mountains and the seas to the ancient demes of Marathon and Eleusis, and then always on to the center peak. Here is a letter complaining of the rapacity of a recent governor, from around 1198. The offense, after all, was against

> Athens, this ancient city, once prosperous, an enemy of tyrants, and a friendly home to wise men from all around; for this last quality it should endear itself to you, if to anyone. Let me add later glories [i.e., Christian ones] to those that are older and already famous. The city boasts a patron protector (*poliouchos*) in the Queen of all, the Parthenos Mother of God, whose divine chamber here may in fact stand on the ancient Akropolis but its head actually touches heaven,[16] or rather it itself is the edge of heaven, being the divine Parthenon of the Theotokos, a world-transcending chamber that projects a myriad of spiritual energies to those who draw near and perform the sacraments.[17]

Michael Choniates is the first known worshiper *of* the Parthenon. There is nothing in classical antiquity to match the intensity of his devotion, but there is something odd about it from the Byzantine point of view too, for it is directed at the spiritual qualities of the temple as much (or more) than at the holy person venerated there. In many passages, Choniates cannot mention his city's protector without leading his thoughts immediately to her cathedral. Amidst the ruins of Athens, Michael, it seems, took solace in the luminous qualities of the Theotokos' temple. He seems to have loved the Parthenon as much as the Parthenos. But in Byzantium religious devotion was ordinarily focused *on* the saint *through* his or her relics and icons, and in no case I know on the church building itself. If, say, the church of St. Demetrios at Thessalonike or of St. John at Ephesos were to be destroyed, it would have been rebuilt; veneration and pilgrimage would have continued as before, so long as the relics survived (and they had a knack for survival). One gains the impression from Athens, however, and not only from Choniates, that the essence of the holy site was invested in the specific temple, that the Atheniotissa would not have been who she was apart from that building. Hagia Sophia in Constantinople might be a partial exception to this general picture, but there was no one saint or holy person honored

[16] Homer, *Iliad* 4.443. [17] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 63.2 (p. 85).

there. The Wisdom of God was an ineffable quality, and its temple unique in different ways.

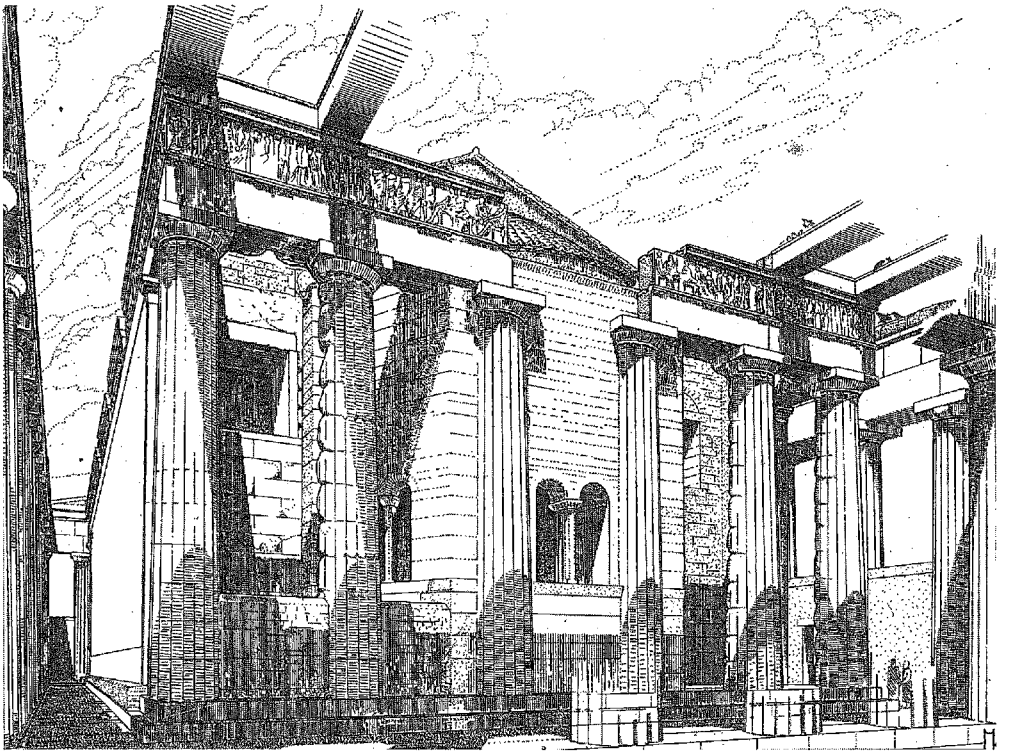
Below we will investigate what Choniates' enthusiasm for the Parthenon owed to his classical education and to his dismay at the evils of his time. But first we should look again at the monument itself, for we know a little more about its adornment in the late twelfth century since the days of its initial conversion in the fifth. A brief discussion will complement the longer account I gave earlier of its conversion into a church. This was the last phase of its existence as an Orthodox church.

The Parthenon in the late twelfth century

There is not much that we can say about the Akropolis as a monumental city center during this period. It is unclear to what extent it had became residential, as later under the Latins and the Ottomans. It seems that the bishops resided in the Propylaia, in a modified section of the north wing, while a nunnery may have existed between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion, though the only evidence for this is a single inscription of the eleventh century (1064) recording the death of the abbess Marina of the monastery of the Holy Trinity (and inscriptions like this are often found far from their place of origin).[18]

The Parthenon had received gifts from the emperor Basileios II in 1018. According to the orators of the twelfth century (quoted in the previous chapter), the church had been substantially improved and adorned by the bishop Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites (1160–1175). The major architectural change was the building of a new apse (Fig. 24, see also Fig. 4). Most of the entire east wall was demolished, including the original late antique semi-circular apse, and a new, grander apse was built, semi-hexagonal on the outside and incorporating the two middle columns of the east porch (pronaos). It had three double-arched windows, one in each wall.[19] The aim of this modification was probably to create a larger surface on the inside of the apse for an enlarged mosaic of the Theotokos. This survived until the late seventeenth century, when it was whitewashed by the Turkish occupants of the Akropolis. Cubes of this mosaic were still scattered about the nineteenth-century ruin, and many were taken to the British Museum. Spyridon Lambros, the great antiquarian of nineteenth-century Athens and first editor of Michael Choniates, remembered that as a child he and

[18] Janin (1975) 336–337; Tanoulas (1997) 20–21. [19] Korres (1996a) 148.



24 The twelfth-century apse (drawing by M. Korres). Note the missing central scene of the frieze procession (the *peplos* scene), removed when the apse was enlarged. The birds on the beams are attested by the traces left by their droppings: they could have dwelled there only in the Byzantine and early Ottoman periods.

his friends would go looking in and around the Parthenon for so-called *chrysopetrai*, "golden stones," from the mosaics.[20] On the outside, the construction of the new apse entailed the removal of the central scene of the eastern part of the frieze procession (the *peplos* scene). It is significant that the scene was carefully lowered to the ground (with a crane) and preserved. At a later point it was built into the nearby wall, where it was drawn by Thomas Hope in the late eighteenth century and then removed by Elgin in the early nineteenth. By that time the figures' faces had been damaged, almost certainly in this case by Muslim occupants. What is important is that the Byzantines sought to preserve the sculptures even when they were in the way and even though they obviously depicted pagan deities and figures (we cannot today know who they thought these figures were; the question of their identity remains open still).

[20] Lambros (1878).

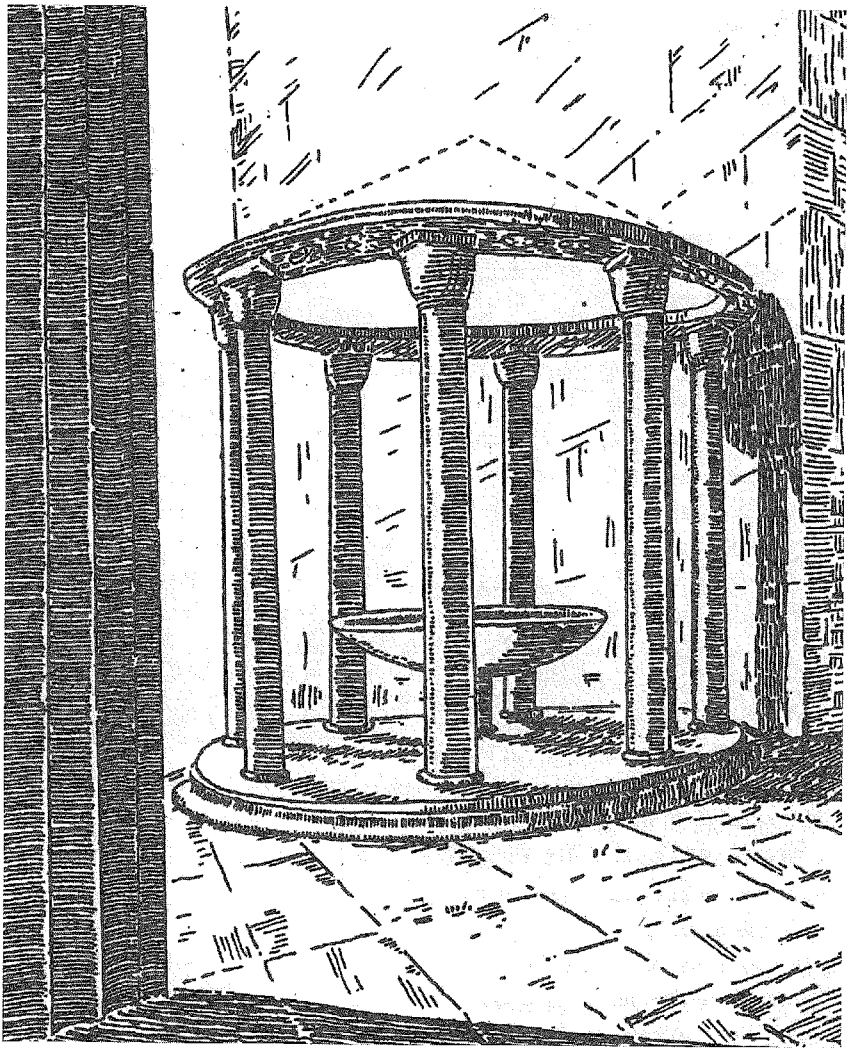
Hagiotheodorites' modifications were notable, but every bishop must have contributed to the adornment and endowment of the cathedral. Choniates wrote a poem in which he listed all that he himself had done for the church he so loved. The verses are dedicated to the Theotokos, but, as so often, quickly turn to the subject of the Parthenon. His *Verses in Honor of the Theotokos* are worth translating in full:

By desire and through labor I added much
to your domain, All Pure One, and your flock.
I beautified your temple, my first concern,
and now bring costly furniture and implements;
I add fields, procure new possessions,
flocks, herds, every species of animal;
I restore churches that collapsed with time,
And build others anew (all who see bear witness).
I increase your clergy, lighten taxes,
or, rather, I tear them up from the root.
So much for my works; but you have done more for me
and greater things, my Lady, and larger than words can say.
You remove sorrow, avert disasters,
cure diseases, and save us from the gates of Hades.[21]
The intrigues of our enemies and the plots of deceit
you tear up like an insubstantial spider web.
I lack only one of the good things of life,
to die where it is good to die; not here,
where the power of the money-men is so great.
When the servants of God die here,
they strip them naked, kick them (O for the love of God)
and mix them another drought of death.
I would like to die there, where I traversed the longest part
of the journey of this life, laboring in letters.[22]
Such is our lot here, and then life comes to an end.
Save me from the fire, appease your Son (*tokos*),
and assign me to the choirs of the saved.

These verses were used by D. I. Pallas to reconstruct a partially surviving twelfth-century inscription on the Parthenon's *phialê*, a marble basin

[21] Interestingly, Makrembolites used the same expression in his *Letter to Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* (pp. 247–248); see p. 134 above.

[22] Presumably, Constantinople, where Michael studied and taught for almost thirty years. As we saw in the previous chapter, Michael's predecessor Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites was also buried in Constantinople, according to his own wishes. We should resist the temptation to ascribe this poem to him instead.



25 Parthenon *phialê* (drawing by A. Xyngopoulos; from Pallas [1932–1934] 194).

surrounded by columns and perhaps capped with a canopy that stood before the entrance to the narthex (Fig. 25). According to his reading, the inscription, which ran along the inside of the canopy (Fig. 26), also invoked the Theotokos as an intercessor.[23]

The interior of the Christian Parthenon and the walls on either side of the main (western) entrance were adorned with paintings of the saints that were still partly visible at the end of the nineteenth century but that have since

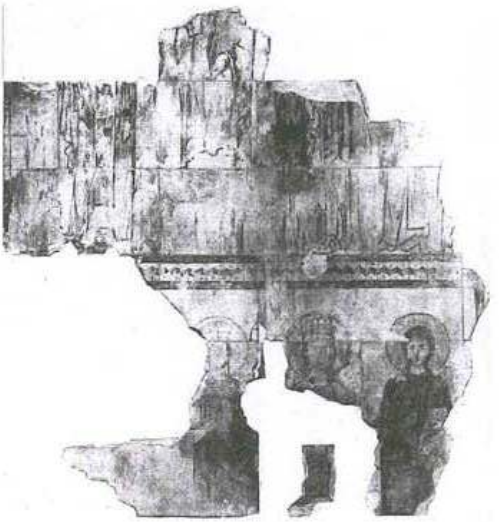
[23] Pallas (1932–1934); Sklavou-Mauroeidi (1999) 178 (no. 246).

26 Surviving portions of the Parthenon *phialê* inscription (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

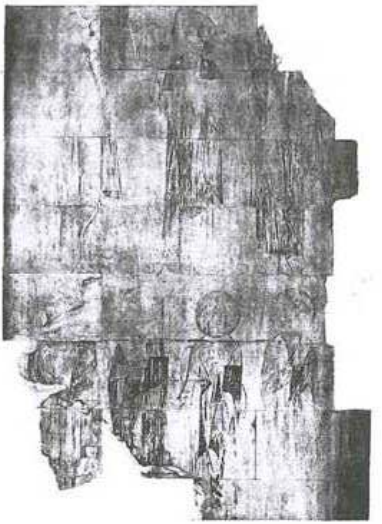
27 Parthenon interior, photo by P. Sebah (1872–1875); from the archive of the Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA); image provided by the Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments (ESMA). Images of saints in medallions could still be discerned along the north side of the inside west wall (i.e., in the church's narthex).

then almost completely disappeared despite an attempt to ensure their conservation in 1913–1914 (Fig. 27).[24] Based on the meager and indirect evidence that we have it is not possible to reconstruct them in any meaningful way or to date them. In this case expert publication was simply delayed too long. The Marquis of Bute (John Crichton-Stuart) had copies

[24] For this effort, see Mallouchou-Tufano (1998) 176.



28 Parthenon paintings I (from Westlake [1888]).



29 Parthenon Paintings II (from Westlake [1888]).

made in 1885, but these too have disappeared (only sketches of them remain; Figs. 28 and 29). He believed that the paintings on the inside of the north wall were older than those on the west and south walls, but his verdicts on other art-historical matters do not inspire confidence and reveal preconceptions. These images, we should note, were painted directly onto the surface of the marble. In the *exonarthex*, for instance, a Theotokos was painted sitting on a high-backed throne, holding the Christ Child and flanked by two angels. The narthex contained images of the Last Judgment and of individual saints. It is impossible to assign these paintings to specific moments or patrons.[25]

The overall effect must have been impressive, as the walls are tall, broad, flat, and imposing, without the curves and niches of Byzantine churches. We must imagine a different Parthenon than the one we are used to, certainly if our image is one of gleaming white walls inside and out. But the Byzantine visitor from afar would also have been startled, because the Parthenon did not look like any familiar church. It is also possible that its exterior walls, those huge and flat marble surfaces, were also painted with images.[26] Were the walls on the outside, then, a mosaic of blues, reds,

[25] The standard discussion is now Cutler (1993–1994). The prior bibliography includes: The Marquis of Bute (1885) 95–98; Westlake (1888), who attempts to date them through comparative material (often western); and Xyngopoulos (1920); for a summary, Chatzidakis (2003) 249–250.

[26] For other Byzantine churches painted on the outside, see Papamastorakis (1989–1990).

browns, and yellows, with figures in procession or in panel scenes? If so, they would have been glimpsed between the columns and partially enclosed by the low wall that had been built between the columns, so they were not entirely outside. On the other hand, they were well illuminated because the temple roof did not extend to the colonnade, allowing light to come in directly to the space between the columns and the walls. Someone really ought to produce a color illustration of what this might have looked like.

We know little about the Parthenon's interior in the age of Choniates. Beyond the skeleton of architectural reconstruction, only imagination can again convey the impression that richly framed icons, painted walls and hangings, mosaics, gold and silver implements, sculpted marble elements, and elegantly carved ecclesiastical furniture would have had on the visitor. The following passage from one of Choniates' orations may offer some aid to the imagination. It was delivered before the *Megas Doux* ("Grand Duke") Michael Stryphnos, who had come to pay his respects to the Parthenon (and restore the affairs of Greece) in 1202–1203. He was accompanied by his wife Theodora, sister of the empress Euphrosyne. At a moment when Constantinople was about to face the Fourth Crusade, Choniates was worrying about the tax-collectors who were ravaging Greece more harshly than the Persians ever had. But not all good things had been taken from Athens, he proclaims, a trace of its virtue did remain. Again, Choniates alludes to the divine light that miraculously burned in the Parthenon:

> Come now, my most honored and divine guest – since you have come to Athens to see for yourself the miracles that occur in this chamber of the Parthenos and of which you have prayed to receive an account – enter the divine palace of the Mother of God, carry the torch, let your soul dance with rhythmical motions, and be initiated forthwith in these great matters. All things in here are great and no mystery is small, as formerly [i.e., in pagan times]. Witness the sacred light, a light that burns without wood and without the sun; witness the clear manifestation in material form of the golden dove of the spirit, which, suspended above the holy altar, rotates in a golden circle and also makes the sign of the worshipful cross on account of a perpetual but barely perceptible rotational flight, as though the main body were still, but the motion is revealed to onlookers only by its parts. Witnessing these things and purifying your mind through these blessed sights, call upon God, experience the transformation of the right hand of the Most High One, and depart truly happy in all ways and blessed. It is with these things that Athens today greets your love of God. For Athens is still wealthy in this way, though only in this way; in other respects it is as you see it [i.e., a ruin].

Choniates' description of the golden dove's motion is hard to interpret. At first, it seems that the dove flew in a circle, like those little toy airplanes

that hang from a string and whiz around annoyingly. Yet it is not easy to imagine how it could fly in a circle *and* also make the sign of the cross. Some have proposed that it flew in a circle around a cross.[27] More likely, Choniates is describing an object that was suspended above the altar and rotated about its axis, thus performing a circular motion ("as though the main body were still, but the motion is revealed ... only by its parts"). The dove may have formed a cross with its wings, thus explaining the conjunction of two otherwise irreconcilable shapes, and providing us with an altogether more solemn and mechanically probable image than the whirling toy.

Finally, we note again the bishop's conceit that the *Megas Doux* has come all the way from Constantinople "to Athens to see for yourself the miracles that occur in this chamber of the Parthenos."

Choniates between past and present

Michael Choniates is one of the most fascinating historical individuals because in him the three cultural pillars of the western world – Greek, Christian, Roman – came together in a most sincere and humane way as he attempted to resolve their deeper contradictions in a time of exceptional turmoil. Choniates was a learned scholar, a caring bishop, and a capable politician and patriotic Roman. But the age in which he lived, and the circumstances of his life, were such that the latent tensions in his cultural ideals were brought to the fore. He idealized the ancient Greeks and expected to find in Athens not only their descendants but also traces of their virtue; at least, so he told the Athenians in his *Inaugural Address* as bishop in 1182. He was very quickly disillusioned. The Greeks would remain for him idealized paragons of peerless virtue, but always out of reach, buried by time like the ruins of the city they had left behind. Choniates knew those Greeks intimately – their language, history, and literature – certainly better than many modern classicists. But so did other Byzantine scholars.[28] What was unique about him was that in becoming the bishop of Athens he was forced to confront the material reality of the ancient world and face the gap that separated Byzantine Hellenists from the ancient Hellenes. Antiquity had been left a ruin, and yet one could still see in its traces that it had been in many respects a better world than twelfth-century Byzantium. It is possible that Choniates commissioned a painting that depicted the city in its ancient

[27] So Lambros (1878) 40–41; Setton (1975b) III 199; Beard (2002) 51.

[28] See Kaldellis (2008a) for that period.

glory, to give visual expression to what he saw in his mind, given that "living in Athens I see Athens nowhere."[29] If only we had this mural! The poem begins with a declaration of love (*eros*) for a city that has vanished in time; Michael was trying to recreate an image of his beloved, including the trials, jurors, speakers' platforms, laws and decrees, orators, festivals, and expeditions, to say nothing of the Muses.

Antiquity was superior in most respects of natural and political virtue, to be sure, but inferior in one respect that Choniates tried to believe was decisive. In his *Inaugural Address*, he flattered his flock by claiming that they were superior to their ancestors in that they were Christians. The true Parthenos had cast out that false virgin Athena while Christian virtues had replaced or enhanced the worldly ones of antiquity. A synthesis of the best from each could be hoped for here too. Alas, Choniates was bitterly disappointed. The Athenians, for one thing, could not fully grasp his Attic sermons. In his first *Catechetical Oration*, he admitted that he subsequently had to dumb it down to their vulgar level, the level of a Persian or a Skythian. Moreover, they were not the best Christians either, contrary to what his fellow classicist Prodromos and his teacher Eustathios had assumed about Christian Athens. Many were corrupt, and he had seen Italians and Frenchmen keep better order in church than these so-called Hellenes.[30]

Worse, the Roman empire itself was falling to pieces, with incompetent emperors and lazy officials, corrupt administrators and greedy tax-collectors, and pirates and Latins controlling the seas and killing at will. Choniates had spent decades in the capital and had absorbed its values and its snobbery, but he now came to identify with the provincials entrusted to his care and spoke out against the indolence and corruption of his own class of men. Not even the fear of God could induce many of them to perform their duties toward their fellow men with a good conscience. Again, this outlook was largely conditioned by his provincial appointment. Being in Athens, at that historical moment in particular, led him to rethink both the relationship between antiquity and the present and that between classical values and the virtues of his fellow Christians. Whereas in his *Inaugural Address* he was willing to consider the possibility that the Athenians of

[29] Michael Choniates, *Verses on Athens* 17 (v. II, pp. 397–398). Painting: Speck (1975); for German translations and commentaries, Breitenbach (2003) 285–286 n. 97, and Rhoby (2003) 29–33; for an English translation and literary analysis, Livanos (2006); for epigrams on works of art in general, Lauxtermann (2003) c. 5; for specific examples, Maguire (1994b); Papalexandrou (2001b); for Choniates' *Inaugural Address* in particular, Rhoby (2003) 33–38; Kaldellis (2007a) 328–330.

[30] Michael Choniates, *Catechetical Oration* 1.26–29, 1.49–52 (v. I, pp. 117, 124–125).

today are superior to their ancestors because of their faith, within a few years he was toying with the opposite, namely that in spite of their pagan religion the ancient Greeks were more blessed than modern Christians because they possessed far greater natural virtue, an astonishing and painful conclusion for a man of his piety.[31]

It is easier to see now why the Parthenon became so important to this man, as it stepped into the breach left by the collapse of his faith in his fellow men and, to a degree, reconciled his religious faith to his classical ideals. On the one hand, the Parthenon was undoubtedly classical and came out of revered antiquity almost intact to be entrusted to Choniates' loving hands; at the same time it was a sublime Christian monument. It had survived ruin and made the transition. It was Athenian, hence provincial, but even the lords of Constantinople had to bow before it. It defined the place to which Choniates sometimes felt that he had been exiled and gave it meaning, in fact exactly the meaning that this classicist-bishop needed: it fused the classical with the Christian. It was classical, but pagan no more; and as a Christian monument, it could not disappoint Choniates as did his flock and the Christian government at Constantinople.

The building had a mystical significance for Choniates, who brought the power of his considerable rhetoric to bear on the mysterious light that illuminated its interior and emanated to the whole of Attica and beyond, to the entire world. His *Inaugural Address* was delivered, we must not forget, before or inside the Parthenon itself. The temple's physical presence alone, that towering elegant bulk, would have lent credence to his vain hope for the continuity of Athenian virtue. The *Address* conludes with a passage that makes the most of the divine light emanating from the Theotokos' temple, fusing it rhetorically with Scriptural references to light and fire. It too must be translated in full:

"It is time now for us to awaken from our sleep," as the Apostle says,[32] and conduct ourselves as we would on the Day,[33] with decorum, justice, and piety, so that we may "become sons of the light and sons of the day"[34] and "bright lights in the world holding forth the Word of life."[35] In that way, we might be worthy of dwelling in this light-receiving and ever-shining place, where the unquenchable fire of Hestia used to be tended, a bright torch of impiety one might call it.[36] That was back when he who became the lucifer of darkness, who gave substance to darkness and fled from the light, led the Athenians of those times astray from the truth, by making it seem

[31] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 50 (pp. 68–70). See below for discussion. [32] Romans 13.11.
[33] Presumably the Day of Judgment. [34] 1 Thessalonians 5.5. [35] Philippians 2.15–16.
[36] Choniates is alluding to Plutarch's *Numa* (9.11–12), on the women who tended the sacred fire at Rome, Delphi, and Athens. See Rhoby (2002) 108–109.

that the leader of darkness is a source of light. But, indeed, ever since the sun of justice dawned from that ever-virginal maiden [the Theotokos], the deceitful and gloomy fire was extinguished, made as dim as the light of a fire-fly by the bright rays of the sun. For they say that the lamps of the sinners are going out.[37] And this Akropolis was liberated from the tyranny of the false Parthenos Athena; no longer is the fire on her altar fed sleeplessly. Now it is the ever-shining torch of the eternal Parthenos and Mother of God that is held up on this peak as though from heaven itself. It does not illuminate only the city and the land beyond Attica, but as much of the earth as the sun traverses. Truly, this was where the darkness of imposture was abundant. For who did Paul find more superstitious than the Athenians?[38] Here the light of truth has now been poured out in great measure, and here God is known and His name is greatly honored, where before He was unknown and remained anonymous.

What dread this place inspires! For this is nothing but the house of God and that is the gate of heaven from where this supercelestial light pours down here to us without cease. It is not dimmed by the day nor interrupted by the night; it does not require fuel; it is immaterial, perfectly pure, always-shining, and always visible to the inviolate eyes of faith. This is a pillar of divine fire, this is the rain that falls from our mystical and light-receiving cloud,[39] by which we may be guided if we should journey through the desert of our vices to "the land that we desire"[40] and the home of the first-born.[41] Indeed, before this happens I all but seem to ascend Mt. Horeb with my flock of sheep and gaze upon a burning bush,[42] but one whose significance resides not in vague and shadowy hints but in the brightest demonstrations of the truth.[43] And there a resonant and divine voice urges me to pass from that place and inherit the promised land. Now look at me! I am about to imagine that I am Moses! The diffusion of this divine light shines around me so brightly that I think that I see not the Akropolis of Athens but that Horeb, upon which God trod, or rather even the edge of heaven itself. From this Akropolis, as from the middle of a circle, rays of light shoot out equally in all directions and set ablaze the entire city. From there they reach to the beyond and extend to infinity, with the result that the city is to the rest of the earth what this sacred place is to the city. Into this temple flows a divine outflow of light originating in the Father of Lights and settling in a different heavenly firmament newer than the orb of the sun. And then it pours itself inexhaustibly from there and scatters itself in equal measure everywhere.

Let us then pay honor to this temple – exquisitely beautiful, well-lit, the graceful palace of the light-receiving and light-giving Parthenos, the holy house of the true light that flashes forth from her, whose delightfulness God has allowed us to

[37] Cf. Proverbs 24.20; Matthew 25.8. [38] Acts 17.22.
[39] Exodus 13.21; Numbers 14.14. [40] Psalm 106.24.
[41] According to some Byzantines, this was Jerusalem: Rhoby (2002) 110 n. 113.
[42] Exodus 3.1 ff.
[43] Presumably reflecting the difference between the Old and New Testaments.

enjoy – and let us never stain it with deeds of the night. We should see the light when we are seen by the light, the light of this illumination by the light of our virtues. And let us heed Paul when he bids us "not to extinguish the spirit."[44] How may we avoid extinguishing the spirit? If we rekindle the fire of love by sparking good deeds, if we preserve the order that has been decreed by him, if each of us does not neglect his affairs, if we do not become rebellious, with our limbs fighting against each other, and if we compose ourselves into one body of Christ, join together harmoniously, and if we depend on each other, like grapes in a cluster, in accordance with God's wishes. For if He promised that He would be present when two or three of us come together in His name,[45] He will be far more fully present in a church such as this, if the congregation is in harmony with itself. Indeed, and may it happen! Then we will be "temples of God"[46] in Christ himself our Lord. Amen.[47]

This passage offers another series of rhetorical variations on the theme of the divine light, which, as we have often seen, had become the dominant image associated with the Byzantine Parthenon. The image captures nicely the church's dominant position over the city and its visibility from all sides; at the same time, the beams that it flashes out to the entire world need not operate solely on a metaphysical or salvific plane, for they act also as a covert image of the shrine's popularity. The image casts Athens as the center of the world and the Parthenon as the center of Athens. Few would doubt the latter image, at any rate. And we note that, again, the temple sometimes eclipses the holy figure revered in it: "Let us then pay honor to this temple," he says. Where else in Byzantium could this be said? Hagia Sophia, perhaps. "In a church such as this" even Christ may be "more fully present." In the Parthenon at Athens! So much for the tirades against Athens by the likes of Romanos and Geometres.

Choniates also draws a strong contrast between the false virgin Athena and the true Parthenos, the Mother of God. This is his most "triumphalist" mode and he is here hostile to the monument's pagan past (though never forgetful of it). He had struck the same chord earlier in the oration, when he praised his audience for having such ancestors and for having surpassed them by accepting the true faith and rejecting the myths about the false virgin goddesses Athens and Artemis – false because Athena had given birth to Erichthonios.[48] This polemical attitude may owe something to the circumstances of the *Inaugural Address*. This was Choniates' first address to the people of Athens and his first official performance in the Parthenon.

[44] 1 Thessalonians 5.19. [45] Matthew 18.20. [46] 1 Corinthians 3.16.

[47] Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 32–38 (v. I, pp. 104–106).

[48] Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 26 (v. I, p. 102); cf. Niketas Choniates, *History* 158. For Athena and Erichthonios/Erechtheus, see Limberis (1994) 136.

He had never before in his life seen anything like this church. Moreover, because of his classical education, he may have been oversensitive to its pagan associations. The very sight of it would have triggered textual allusions and ritual associations – such as the fire of Hestia. Perhaps his condemnation of Athena was meant to abjure thoughts and feelings that he was more susceptible to than were the majority of Athenians, who had grown up in the shadow of the monument and were used to thinking of it as their city's church. Certainly, the Athenians were aware of their city's pagan past – as we will see in the next chapter, they were well aware of it and exploited it deftly – but they all had a lifetime in which to reconcile opposites. In his *Inaugural Address*, Choniates was doing this for himself for the first time; he was setting the tone of his own Athenian episcopate by declaring the proper relationship between the classical past and the Christian present.

The only thing that could have prepared Choniates for his first speech before an Attic audience was the rhetoric that had swirled around contemporary Athens in the learned discourse of the capital, as scholars and bishops wrote to, and about, each other. We may detect in his *Inaugural Address* some of the themes developed by Theodoros Prodromos in his *Life of St. Meletios*. Choniates presents Athens as having made the transition from the most extreme paganism to the pinnacle of Christian devotion, a transition mediated by St. Paul, who, in many ways, had set the tone for Athenian Christianity. By contrast, what is missing from the *Inaugural Address* is Prodromos' allusive rehabilitation of the pagan past.

But Choniates had other modes for other occasions, and history, moving now at an accelerated pace, caused him to reconsider. In his letters and orations to imperial officials he kept citing the ancient statesmen of Athens as models of just political action. His favorite was Aristeides the Just, probably because of the equitable tax assessment that he imposed on the cities of Greece. As Byzantine officials became more corrupt, Choniates turned more and more to the classical past to find answers to current problems. After all, what did the Christian saints have to do with matters of taxation and administration? Besides, a governor of Byzantine Hellas was more likely to be impressed by a classical model, standing as he was before or inside the Parthenon while being lectured, than by a saint whose life and miracles he had heard about elsewhere and had already learned to ignore. Choniates realized that he could make the monument itself complicit in his rhetorical appeals, just as he had used it in his *Inaugural Address* to bolster his argument for Athenian continuity from antiquity to the present. In the speech to Stryphnos, he concludes his list of ancient

heroes with Alexander by noting that the conqueror of Persia had sent shields to adorn "the temple on this Akropolis." That gives a powerful material presence to the rhetorical argument and anchored the city's cathedral in a more glorious martial past. And Choniates would even reconsider the problem of paganism. As I noted above, in one letter to an official he went so far as to burst out:

> O those blessed men! I do not reproach them for their distorted religion but call them *blessed* because, even though they worshiped so, they practiced virtue and knew beauty, daring the sea and long journeys to put human life in order.[49]

He goes on to cite ancient statesmen, thinkers, and heroes such as Aristeides, Plato, and Herakles, who labored to improve human life. Choniates turned increasingly to antiquity as he realized that his fellow Byzantines were failing both as men of action and as Christians. The Parthenon gave him some consolation in both respects.

Leon Sgouros (1204) and the end of Byzantine Athens

Choniates, it turned out, was not lacking in Hellenic virtue himself. In the years before the arrival of the Fourth Crusade, the Byzantine empire continued to unravel. Local strongmen seized the opportunity to pick up the pieces and establish regional dominions. One of the most formidable was the ruthless Leon Sgouros, out of Nauplion. In the first years of the new century, he declared his independence from the tottering regime in Constantinople, seized Argos, and then marched on Corinth, whose bishop he blinded and threw off a cliff. He then concentrated his naval and land forces on Athens, possibly in the spring or summer of 1204, just as the Crusaders were besieging and sacking the capital. But Choniates would not surrender the citadel. The two men met and the bishop tried to persuade the rebel to withdraw, appealing to both his Christian faith and his Roman patriotism. But Sgouros was now convinced that only might made right, and prepared for a siege. Leaving the conference, he began to bombard the Akropolis. He could not have expected much resistance. There were no imperial authorities in Greece and no armies to resist him. But the response he received was unexpected. Choniates set up engines of war atop the walls of the Akropolis and armed the defenders with missiles. Sgouros gave up in

[49] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* Megas Doux *Stryphnos* 44 (v. I, p. 341); *Letter* 50 (pp. 68–70).

exasperation, and set the lower city to the torch, carrying away the livestock. He moved on to Thebes, which fell without resistance.

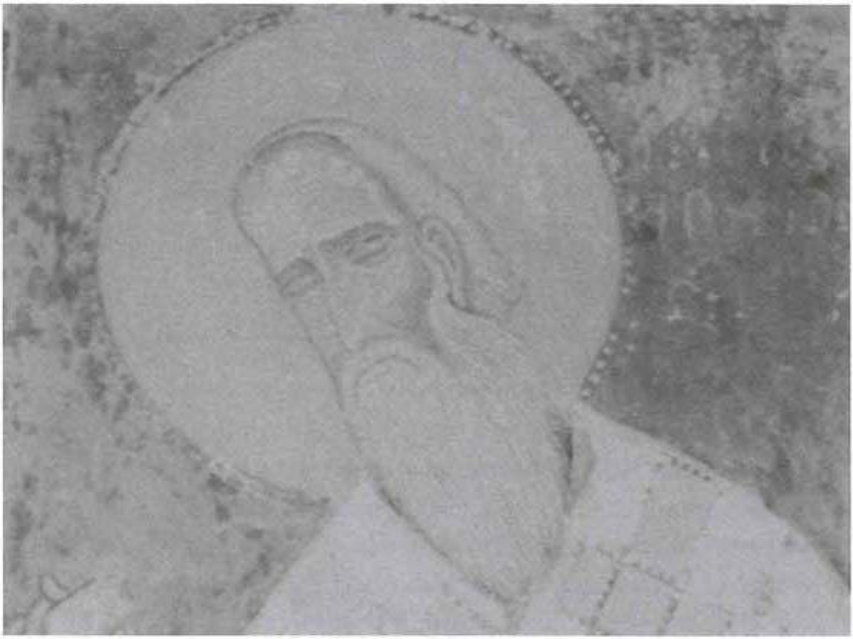
Choniates' actions were brave, especially for a classicist-bishop who, as far as we know, had no experience of war. But his heroism can be accused of being futile. In the name of what legitimate authority was he holding Athens against Sgouros? Possibly the regime in Constantinople had not yet fallen, but Choniates himself had railed against its incompetence and corruption. Why sacrifice the lower town? As lord of Athens, Sgouros would at least provide some security, and if he then fell before a more legitimate imperial army, so much the better. Choniates must have considered these arguments, or heard them from his advisors. But we cannot rule out the possibility that he was protecting the Parthenon and its rich collection of offerings from the rebel's rapacity and need for bullion. His brother Niketas, the historian, provides us with a further motive for resisting Sgouros, one which casts Choniates' actions in the best light. Sgouros had demanded the surrender of a young man in the bishop's charge, possibly the son of an enemy, and Choniates refused on principle, suspecting the worst. This may explain the desperate resistance and makes it noble rather than futile.

Failing at Athens, Sgouros marched to Thermopylai and Larissa, but retreated to Corinth in the face of the advancing army of Bonifatius, the marquis de Montferrat, who had been allotted Greece when the Crusaders divided up the empire's lands among themselves. Sgouros was confined on the Akrokorinth for a few years, until his death in 1208. Choniates, meanwhile, decided that he could not withstand the marquis as he had Sgouros, and so surrendered what was left of the city to the Latins, probably in early 1205. Thus was Athens forever lost to Byzantium.[50]

Choniates spent most of the following two decades on the island of Keos, within sight of Attica. He would refuse to take sides in the struggle between the emerging Byzantine principalities of Epeiros (in northwest Greece) and Nikaia (in northwest Asia Minor), though he offered his advice to both. What he wanted was for the Byzantines to unite and drive the detested Latins out of the empire's lands. The thought that a Latin bishop was performing the liturgy in his beloved Parthenon rankled. He wrote a brief poem to the Theotokos lamenting that a horde of arrogant Italians had driven him from Athens and her "divine temple," but takes consolation that she will provide him with another wherever he ends up.[51] But a Parthenos

[50] Niketas Choniates, *History* 605–610. For Sgouros, see Vlachopoulou (2002). The exact dates of his marches are disputed.

[51] Michael Choniates, *Poem to the Theotokos* (v. II, pp. 392–393).



30 Image of Michael Choniates from the church of St. Peter, Kalyvia Koubara, Attica (1232; copy in the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

without a Parthenon must have paled in comparison. Meanwhile Sgouros, while besieged in the Akrokorinth, killed the son of one of Choniates' nephews for accidentally breaking one of his favorite glass cups. Choniates wrote two long letters of consolation to his nephew for the loss of his son, condemning the rebel's severity. Could Sgouros not endure the loss of a single glass when Choniates himself had put up with so much more?

> This [the murder] has now added to my own misfortunes and has occasioned more grief. For I, wretch that I am, have not yet sufficiently lamented the loss of God's undefiled, holy, and most costly implements, which have fallen now into defiled hands and are being impiously cast into the same melting-pot – O patient Christ, King, Averter of Evil! – nor yet have I grieved for the holy Akropolis of Athens, my lot in life, and the most holy Parthenon of the Mother of God upon it, which has now become a den of thieves.[52]

Even in exile, it was the Parthenon that Choniates still valued above all. He compared its loss to his nephew's loss of his own son! He would never reclaim his cathedral just as Athens would never again be governed by the

[52] Michael Choniates, *Letter* 101.13 (p. 146).

Byzantines. But Choniates himself was remembered with affection and even devotion in the city he labored so hard to protect for over two decades. In his *Inaugural Address* he had claimed that many of his friends had congratulated him when he was appointed to Athens rather than to any other city, but in the long run it may have been Athens that was lucky to obtain a bishop such as he. At least two images of Choniates survive in two churches at opposite ends of Attica that depict him with a halo, dating to shortly after his death in exile (Fig. 30).[53] And in 1220 Choniates' student from Athens, then the bishop of Kerkyra (Corfu), Georgios Bardanes, lifted a phrase from his mentor's praise of the Parthenon and graciously referred to him too as the *lumen orbis*.[54]

[53] Mouriki (1973–1974) 85, 96–98, 106–107, 111; for an English summary, see Chatzidakis (2003) 267. Other studies of his portraiture are cited in Kolovou (1999) 22 n. 68. For the congratulations he had received, see Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 8 (v. I, p. 95).

[54] Hoeck and Loenertz (1965) 176.

7 | Why the Parthenon? An attempt at interpretation

The mysterious success of Christian Athens

The evidence that I have surveyed in this study points inescapably to a set of conclusions that fundamentally challenges how we view the history of Athens, the reception of the classical past in the Middle Ages, and the internal dynamics of Byzantine culture. First, regarding Athens, it was certainly not the backwater it is made out to be by so many historians. It was an important center of imperial provincial activity during the Dark Age of the seventh and eighth centuries and it hosted one of the most important Christian shrines in later centuries, to which emperors, monks, saints, and writers paid homage. There are few provincial cities in Byzantium about which a study of this kind can be written (at least, not without much historical "padding," which I have largely avoided here). Athens maintained its presence.

As regards Byzantium, what we are told about it in many modern studies leaves us unprepared to deal with the fact that the Byzantines honored the Parthenon so highly, more highly than the temple was honored in antiquity. In general, the modern literature confronts us with two very different cultures, the Greek characterized by nude statues, temples, and free philosophical thought, all light and sun; and its Byzantine successor, characterized by somber icons (not one ever smiles), strict orthodoxy, stifling piety, and court intrigue. And yet we have found adoration of the Parthenon and an eloquent imagery of light, beginning in the darkest part of the Dark Age.

To be fair, the cult of the Parthenon deviates in some ways from the mainstream of Byzantine piety. Perhaps it would be best to define these ways before we attempt to explain how this idiosyncratic form of worship was made possible in the first place.

Much of our evidence for worship in the Christian Parthenon relates to pilgrims who traveled to Athens for that purpose, so we can approach the problem, at least initially, from the standpoint of pilgrimage. The contours of Christian pilgrimage were set in late antiquity. The main destinations were the Holy Lands and other places that had been imbued with a sacred aura by the events of the Old and New Testament or by the presence of a

holy man, whether living (more rarely) or of his relics (more often). The pious hope of the pilgrim was to approach the specific locus of sanctity, to enter its aura, see it, touch it if possible. Scholars distinguish between local pilgrimage and travel to Palestine. The latter was more arduous and spectacular to recount, but it was probably not the most common. After the sixth century, few Byzantines went on pilgrimage to Palestine. On the whole, they do not seem to have been very interested in earthly Jerusalem. If we exclude monks who traveled to the Holy Lands in their spiritual peregrinations, after having renounced family and local ties, and limit ourselves to laymen who traveled to Palestine for religious reasons with the intention of returning home and continuing their lives, we are left with a small number. In the middle period, religious traffic was largely directed to Constantinople, which many regarded as a "new Jerusalem," based on the number of holy relics that were safeguarded there; the sheer number of churches and monasteries; and the role that the City played in God's plan for the salvation of mankind through the conversion of Constantine. Constantinople was the center of the Byzantine world in both the religious and the secular realms.[1]

Local cults continued to be important, but their popularity was in almost all cases based on the veneration of the relics of a saint, more rarely a living holy man, and rarely too a miraculous icon. Icons were for the most part not the object of pilgrimage, but rather visual signs that drew pilgrims toward the true object of their devotion. Miracles occured at many holy places. The majority of pilgrims seeking miracles wanted to be healed of various bodily and mental maladies. But some sites featured regular, recurring miracles that did not heal; their function was rather to validate the sacred authority of the shrine. The most famous case was the shrine of the Theotokos at Blachernai in Constantinople. According to sources of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, every Friday evening the veil that covered the icon would rise up miraculously. Crowds would gather to witness this, including pilgrims from western Europe. Few provincial cities could rival Ephesos in religious attractions, which boasted the tomb and church of St. John the Evangelist; the cave of the Seven Sleepers; the tombs and relics of many saints; and an annual miracle (dust would suddenly puff out of St. John's tomb, proving that he was sleeping, not dead). At Nikaia, the annual miracle at the shrine of St. Tryphon consisted of dry bulbs

[1] For pilgrimage, see Bitton-Ashkelony (2005) 6–8; and Talbot (2002a) 60. The standard work on late antiquity is Maraval (1985); for later pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, Külzer (1994); summary in Külzer (2002); for pilgrims to holy men, Frank (2000); for Constantinople as "new Jerusalem," Alexander (1962); Patlagean (1998); Külzer (1994) 134–136.

that were placed in the saint's lamp and suddenly bloomed out of season. Thessalonike was the city of St. Demetrios, whose relics produced a miraculous and sweet-smelling *myron* (unguent), at least after the seventh century. At Chonai, an annual celebration commemorated an ancient miracle performed by the Archangel Michael, the city's patron (he had diverted a river to protect a hermit in the Apostolic age).[2]

It quickly becomes apparent upon reflection that Athens did not conform to these patterns, that it was unique as a major site of pilgrimage. It had no Old Testament credentials and a brief and quite ambiguous presence in the New Testament (limited to St. Paul in Acts). No saints or holy men were active there, as far as we can tell. We have found no one in the sources who traveled to the Parthenon specifically in order to be healed – though some, like Makrembolites, thanked the Theotokos Atheniotissa after surviving an illness. The only miracle attested there, if indeed it was that, involved light, and is not attested before the twelfth century. Moreover, much of the interest in the shrine, and the attention of our sources, was directed to the temple itself, sometimes more than to the person honored in it. Recent studies have drawn attention to how the material aspects of early medieval shrines enhanced worship, but their analysis presupposes a saint or relic at the heart of the experience; accordingly, the shrines that they discuss evolved around the saint's worship.[3] In those cases, architecture was oriented toward or around the saint, while in Athens the Atheniotissa was, by contrast, defined by her "luminous chamber." There can be no question that the city's classical past was complicit in the construction of the shrine's Christian prestige, but how was this possible?

Before attempting to answer this, let us consider in more detail the city's (lack of) Christian credentials. What kind of a Christian site did pilgrims believe they were in?

Athens' meager Christian credentials

Athens plays no role in the Old Testament and its appearance in the New Testament is not exactly uplifting. To be sure, it provides the setting for one of

[2] For icons and pilgrimage, see Weyl Carr (2002) esp. 79–80 for Blachernai; for the latter, see also Papaioannou (2001), citing previous bibliography; for Ephesos, Foss (2002) 130–131, 138–140; for Nikaia, 142; for Chonai, Xyngopoulos (1959); for Thessalonike, Bakirtzis (2002), citing previous bibliography. For pilgrimage and healing, see Talbot (2002b); for pilgrimage and holy men in the middle period, see Greenfield (2002).

[3] Hahn (1997) for relics; Frank (2000) for living saints.

Paul's more interesting speeches, but the author of Acts can barely conceal the fact that the new faith found only limited appeal among the Athenians, some of whom laughed at the Apostle's message about the Resurrection.[4] Acts ascribes to the city an excessive devotion to idols and an addiction to philosophical and rhetorical subtlety, of a kind that proved resistant to the Christian Gospel. This image clung to Athens in late antiquity, when its philosophers propounded until quite late an anti-Christian form of Platonic philosophy. No major events in the narrative of the Apostolic age occurred there and, despite Paul's visit, it is highly unlikely that later Byzantines would have thought of Athens in connection with the early ministries (for example, we have no epistles to the Athenians). Athens, in short, had meager Scriptural credentials. As far as we know, only Meletios the Younger in the eleventh century is said to have visited Athens *because* Paul had been there and for all we know this may have been a rhetorical motif introduced by his hagiographer Theodoros Prodromos (compare pope John Paul II in 2001, and Christian tour groups today that follow in the Apostle's footsteps, which actually focus more on Corinth because of the epistles). Moreover, the shrine of the Theotokos in the Parthenon was not associated with Paul in any way.

We have no *vita* of any early Christian or Byzantine saint whose activity was centered on Athens and whose fame might have attracted pilgrims, either during or after his or her lifetime. The *Synaxarion of Constantinople* lists some of the first Athenian converts, most famously Dionysios the Areopagite as well as a certain Hierotheos the Areopagite, whose career was confused with – or rather invented after – that of Dionysios: both were members of the Areopagos, both were converted by Paul, and both were ordained bishops of Athens (Hierotheos was supposed to have been Dionysios' teacher in the faith). Pope Innocentius III, in ca. 1209, mentions a monastery of St. Dionysios the Areopagite in the letter that he wrote to Bérard, the first Latin archbishop of Athens, confirming the rights and privileges of his recently acquired see. But the dedication (or rededication) of this monastery may have been the work of the Latin occupiers, who were more interested in that saint than were the Byzantines, in part because in the West the Areopagite was confused with Dionysios (Denys), the missionary to Gaul. It is not certain that there was such a monastery in Athens before 1204.[5] In other words, the modern dedication of Athens to St. Dionysios is a Latin innovation and does not date to Byzantine times.

[4] See the end of Chapter 1.

[5] For Hierotheos and Dionysios, see *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* October 3 sec. 1 and October 4 sec. 1 (pp. 101–103). Innocentius III, *Letter 256 to Bérard, Archbishop of Athens*

The *Synaxarion* and other later ecclesiastical sources name a number of martyrs who were either born or died in Athens during the early persecutions, but there is no evidence that they were especially revered or even remembered there in Byzantine times; that they had churches named after them; or that they attracted visitors. Nor did these figures have anything to do with the Parthenon, which is what did draw pilgrims to Athens.[6] It was not until much later (1395, to be exact) that Dionysios is first linked to the Parthenon in our sources, in the pilgrimage account by the Italian Niccolò da Martoni. He records a tradition according to which the saint carved a cross on one of its columns the moment he sensed the occurrence of the Passion in distant Jerusalem.[7] But this was certainly a western imposition on the monument, reflecting western interest in that saint. There would have been ample occasion during the period of Latin rule after 1204 to associate one of the many crosses carved on the Parthenon columns with such a famous local figure.

Two saints who were venerated in Byzantine Athens were Leonides and Martinianos. The first was martyred under Decius (AD 250). Michael Choniates delivered a commemorative address in his honor, from which it can be inferred that he had a feast-day. Choniates makes it clear that the remains of Leonides and of the seven women who were martyred with him were preserved in a *martyrion* a short distance from the city. Possibly there was not a church in their honor in Athens and they do not seem to have attracted much outside attention.[8] The other saint was Martinianos from

1561A; and Janin (1975) 307–308. The first to claim that Dionysios became bishop of Athens was Dionysios of Corinth in Eusebios, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.23.3.

[6] For some of these figures, see *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* May 15 and 18 (pp. 687–688, 691–693). For the local saints of Athens, see Pallas (1989) 856–863; di Branco (2005) 70–71.

[7] Le Grand (1895) 651.

[8] Michael Choniates, *Oration for the Martyr Leonides and his Companions* esp. 5–6 (v. I, pp. 151–153). See Soteriou (1927) 53, for the *martyrion*; Halkin (1953) for an account of the martyrdom; Janin (1975) 322–323 doubts the connection with the Ilissos basilica; see now Laskaris (2000) 370–372; in general, di Branco (2005) 82–84. Initially the saint had nothing to do with Athens.

St. Menas, martyred in Egypt, does not seem to have been especially honored in Athens, despite that according to one version of his life both he and his fellow martyrs were Athenians and, true to form, highly educated: Symeon Metaphrastes, *Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, and Eugraphos* 369 and 373; for the versions of his life – if in fact we are dealing with one figure – see Kazhdan (1985); Pallas (1989) 862–863; di Branco (2000–2001) 639–641 and (2005) 78–80. No part of the story takes place in Athens and it is possible that no one in Athens knew of this version until quite late. St. Menas was a major center of pilgrimage in Egypt: Maraval (2002) 68 and n. 34.

The composite and probably legendary figure of Markos the Athenian, who lived in an Ethiopian cave for a century (probably in the mid third to mid fourth centuries, though his life was written much later), also seems to have been unknown in Athens; see Angelidi (1989).

Palestinian Kaisareia, a legendary figure whose *vita*, essentially a hagiographical romance, is set vaguely in late antiquity. After being tempted horribly by lascivious visions, Martinianos traveled to many cities before ending up in Athens, where he died in "the church." The *vita* is probably set before the conversion of the Parthenon, though later Byzantines who heard it may well have thought of that church in connection with his death (for them, as we have seen, the Parthenon was just "the church in Athens"). Choniates delivered an address in honor of this saint too, mentioning his *panêgyris*, but only the last page survives, so we do not know whether he connected the saint's death "in the church" to the city's cathedral in the Byzantine period.[9]

One scholar has proposed that the relics of Martinianos were kept in the Parthenon. This is because one of the versions of the *Synaxarion* entry for saint Phantinos (late tenth century), whom I discussed in an earlier chapter, says that he visited Athens to pray at the Parthenon and embrace Martinianos' relics. This does not necessarily mean, however, that those relics were physically kept in the Parthenon, and the silence of all our other sources in this regard is telling. Besides, as we saw, a different version of Phantinos' *Synaxarion* entry mentions the relics of St. Andreas instead of those of Martinianos; a third omits the relics altogether but retains the Parthenon; while Phantinos' full-length *vita* does not say anything regarding the purpose of his visit. In any case, it is important to note that Phantinos is the *only* pilgrim who traveled to Athens for its relics (as well as for the Parthenon). Given the exclusive adoration of the Parthenon found in all other disussions of medieval Athens, Phantinos is exceptional precisely for being more conventional by Byzantine standards.[10] For what it's worth, Niccolò da Martoni does not mention the relics of either St. Andreas or Martinianos when he discusses the Parthenon, though he mentions many other relics.

One final piece of evidence remains to be discussed regarding the saints of Athens. Up to 1870 a three-story structure with windows and doorways used to stand on top of a few of the surviving columns of the temple of Olympian Zeus (Fig. 31). Originally, it had timber planks for the floors and roof. The structure was already quite old by the late fourteenth century. Western scholars and travelers between the fourteenth and seventeenth

[9] For Martinianos, see the *vita* in Rabbow (1895); and Latyšev (1970) 58–67; also the entry in the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* February 13 sec. 1 (pp. 461–462) (Athens is mentioned only in the version given in the apparatus). Michael Choniates, *Oration for St. Martinianos* (v. I, pp. 343–344).

[10] For Martinianos and the Parthenon, see Follieri (1987) 212–220. For Phantinos, see Chapter 4.

31 The temple of Zeus in Athens showing the remains of the medieval superstructure: *Photographs by James Robertson: "Athens and Grecian Antiquities", 1853–1854, from the Photographic Archive of the Benaki Museum* (© Benaki Museum, Athens, 1998) 113.

centuries believed that this belonged to "the palace of Hadrian," which was, it seems, built on top of the temple's columns (it is not clear whether this was a local tradition or a western invention). More recently, historians believed that it was a stylite dwelling, belonging to a saint unattested in the record for Byzantine Athens. However, the repairs and modifications made to this structure point to a usage that exceeded the lifetime of one man. It has recently been reinterpreted as a watch-tower of sorts. Whatever it was, it was not suitable or appropriate for stylite habitation.[11] So we are left with no evidence for any period during which a living holy man may have attracted pilgrims to Athens.

In short, Athens was not famous for its saints or its relics, nor is there any reliable evidence that the Parthenon housed relics during the Byzantine period. The city was also not famous for its icons, as we have no reference

[11] Bouras (1996).

to any icon of the Theotokos Atheniotissa. Certainly, there were icons in the Parthenon, as well as paintings and an impressive apse mosaic, but these did not attract visitors and were apparently not miraculous. The legend of the "Athenaia" icon painted by St. Luke and taken to the monastery of Soumela in the Pontos probably originated, as we saw, in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The promotion of the Parthenon by Byzantine writers and the bishops of the city in the twelfth century was distinctly aniconic, playing on the image of the divine light (a theme that I will examine separately below).

Deconstructing the Christian Parthenon

From almost every text that we have surveyed so far we have learned more about the hold of the Parthenon on the Byzantine imagination than about the place of the Parthenos in Byzantine piety. No other pilgrimage site in the empire placed such an emphasis on the church itself, or indeed any emphasis at all, and this must be related to the fact that this was no ordinary church just as Athens was no ordinary city. The only other exception was Hagia Sophia, which was unique in many other ways as well. What was it then about the Parthenon that attracted *Christian* pilgrims and visitors in such numbers that it had not seen in antiquity and would not see again until the rise of modern tourism?

For starters, we know of no one who traveled to Athens in order to be cured at the Parthenon. According to his *vita*, Phantinos fell ill and recovered at Athens, but there is no suggestion of miraculous intervention in the account, and no link to the Parthenon. In the twelfth century, a certain Makrembolites offered thanks to the Atheniotissa for saving him from a potentially fatal sickness. But such expressions of gratitude after recovery must have been common. Choniates uses exactly the same language in a general list of the Theotokos' benefactions to mankind, and there is no reason to think that Makrembolites traveled to Athens in order to be cured.

Besides, as we have seen, our sources focus on the building itself, and buildings do not perform healing miracles. The only miracle that regularly took place in the Parthenon had to do with the mysterious light we have so often encountered. In sum, we are dealing with a unique situation and in order to interpret it we will have to find a way to go beyond the rhetoric of our primary sources, which disguise rather than reveal that which we want to know, as well as beyond the categories that frame the modern discussion

of pilgrimage. These give pride of place to the Holy Lands, to saints, relics, icons, and healings, but we may have to invent a new category, even if only to satisfy this one case. In fact, it is possible that the religious prominence in the Byzantine world of Athens and the Parthenon specifically has been missed by historians precisely because religious importance has been defined in terms of saints, relics, healing miracles, and icons. The evidence for the Parthenon has been available for some time, but, as so often, we have not seen what we did not expect to find. Moreover, in terms of the cult of the Theotokos, which has often been studied, the more bombastic and imperial claims of Constantinople have overshadowed the more provincial and elegant attractions of the Atheniotissa.

Why, then, do the sources draw attention to the *church* of the Theotokos? We must put them on the stand and interrogate them. Their weakest point is the persistent claim that the church was "famous." It is weak because they never tell us why exactly it was famous, or what it was about this church in particular that warranted such devotion *from Christians*. By a certain point, of course, the church was famous for being well known, like some modern celebrities, but this will not do as an explanation. What were the grounds of its fame? At this point we must not deny what is still before our eyes, what was before the eyes of all medieval visitors to the Akropolis. The Parthenon as a church may have been dedicated to the Theotokos, but it was not just *any* church, and when our sources affect to be honoring it just because it was a church of the Theotokos – as they nearly all do – they are being disingenuous. This was not any church, and their interest in the building itself gives them away. It was also an ancient, monumental, and awesome marble temple, scarcely altered from the days when it was erected by the most famous and wise city of antiquity in the days of its greatest power, the city that in Byzantium stood for the best that the ancient world had to offer, the city of poetry, philosophy, and rhetoric, also *the* city of idolatry. There was no city like Athens in antiquity and there was no church like the Parthenon in Byzantium. Nearly all travelers to Athens would have been aware of these facts consciously or unconsciously, whether they had been educated in Constantinople or not. The Athenians whom they met would also have been aware of their city's past and, as we will see, were probably eager to talk about it. In contrast to Constantinople, however, in Athens classicism was not exclusively a matter of *literary* education: it was also, or primarily, part of the physical fabric of the city. One could not just drop the Theotokos into a setting like that and expect the normal rules of Byzantine piety to apply. The overwhelming logic of the Athenian past could not simply be wiped out or ignored, it could only be suppressed or sublimated.

At Athens, in the Parthenon cult of the Theotokos Atheniotissa, the past was both suppressed and sublimated. On one level, Christianity had triumphed over paganism, and the Theotokos, the true virgin, had cast out Athena, the false goddess and false virgin. The Parthenon was her temple now and was capable of inspiring the highest peaks of genuine Christian devotion. But on another level, the very evocation of discontinuity carried within it the remembrance of that other past, and therefore the lineaments of continuity. The labor was Sisyphean, as the temple itself was a constant reminder of the past, of the fact that triumph was, in the end, usurpation. One virgin figure had taken the place of the other, but the place remained, wrapped in the same marble blocks and sculptures. The office of *polio-uchos* was exercised from the same throne, which had merely been reassigned.

In the Byzantine sources that enthuse about the Parthenon, we can discern an ideological rupture, a theoretical gap. The justification offered simply does not explain what was going on. "The church of the Theotokos," they say, but there were many churches of the Theotokos: Why this one? "The *glorious* church of the Theotokos," then ... But why exactly was this church more glorious than all the rest? The sources never tell us, or rather they never *quite* tell us. They tell us more than they think they tell us, but they cannot tell us precisely what we demand to know. The bipolar logic of Byzantine Orthodoxy and classicism lacked the ideological apparatus with which to come to grips with and express this reality. Choniates and the others could not admit to us what fascinated them about this temple because they could not quite put it into words for themselves. They were compelled by the triumphalist rhetoric of their religion to officially deny a complex reality that had been enacted in Athens for centuries, ever since the conversion of the Parthenon in the late fifth century, a reality that had taken root in them too and shaped their perceptions. What shall we call this "supplement" that, on the one hand, enabled the exaltation of the Theotokos on the Akropolis but, on the other, could not be openly expressed?

We are dealing here with a non-discursive determinant of an enacted practice, a subliminal psychological supplement that promoted the cult of the Atheniotissa and was associated with the Byzantine view of the ancient world, of Athens; as such, we are not authorized to give it a specific label. Whatever it was, it was suppressed in the official rhetoric but also sublimated, as the exaltation of the Theotokos on the Akropolis would have been impossible without it. In other words, the textual, discursive rhetoric of the cult disguised the preconditions of its own existence, but at the same time carried them within its highest pitches as a hidden harmonic. The "true

meaning" of the Parthenon was trapped between a discursive Christian element and a non-discursive subliminal supplement that pointed to the monument's non-Christian background. This asymmetric dialectic calls for philosophical deconstruction, such as that pioneered by Jacques Derrida.

> The critic will be on the lookout for different sorts of conflict. The first ... is the asymmetrical opposition or value-laden hierarchy, in which one term is promoted at the expense of the other. The question for the critic is whether the second term, treated as a negative, marginal, or supplementary version of the first, does not prove to be the condition of possibility of the first. Along with the logic that asserts the preeminence of the first term, is there a contrary logic, covertly at work but emerging at some crucial moment or figure in the text, which identifies the second terms as the enabling condition of the first?[12]

A brief word on theoretical deconstruction. In the aftermath of Nietzsche and Derrida, to deconstruct a theory does not merely mean to refute it or even to show that it is socially conditioned rather than absolutely true. These are blunt weapons in the arsenal of criticism. It means, rather, to examine the conceptual framework that structures our perceptions of reality and the polarities on which it rests. We often find that these polarities appear to us as constitutive elements of reality itself, whereas in fact they are only interpretations of reality, motivated by various political, cultural, religious, or, in a word, ideological factors. When looked at more closely, some of the cardinal distinctions between the two sides – subject and object, writing and speaking, cause and effect – appear not to run so cleanly between them but also through them both. There is nothing magical or mystical about deconstruction, though certainly it is all too often presented in an obscurantist way by those who wish to impress rather than stimulate thought. Deconstruction is, moreover, more easily and appropriately used as a method of tackling the philosophical tradition at the highest level, the grand theories about what the world is like as it is perceived and interpreted by human beings; it is less easy to apply to specific historical problems such as this one – which rests on polarities such as pagan and Christian, classical and Byzantine – because the conceptual dialectic is disrupted by the messiness of historical practice, for which history, moreover, there is inadequate evidence.

> To "deconstruct" philosophy would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy – what

[12] Culler (1992) 183.

this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this ... repression.[13]

There is no question that in Byzantine Athens the normative relationship between paganism and Christianity, between Athena and the Atheniotissa, was unstable. The hierarchy that is postulated in our sources reveals, at a deeper level of analysis, a fascinating dependency. The "higher" term was made possible only by the continued presence of the "lower." We can see this in the many texts that narrate Christian journeys to Athens, beginning with that of St. Paul, in which the classical past weighs heavily on authorial decisions. It comes closer to the surface in the confessions of a classicist-bishop such as Michael Choniates, in whom the whole matter had an additional psychological dimension. Choniates vacillated between the virtues of the Greeks and the supremacy of his faith. His odes to the Parthenon seem to be trying to say more than he will admit openly, because he used the monument to bridge a gap he could not explicitly acknowledge. His philology linked him to that past and was something of which he was proud; in fact, he defined himself as a *philologos* in the first word of the preface that he composed for a volume of his collected works.[14] His anxieties regarding the classical past can be profitably compared to what has been written about a modern philologist's experience of the Akropolis. Renan claimed that he felt "a fresh and bracing breeze coming from afar."

> This is no doubt the exuberant confession of a philological psyche yearning for the concreteness of the past [cf. the painting that Choniates commissioned], but what is crucial is that once again the shadow of the "postlapsarian moment" hovers amidst the ruins of Athens. Athens becomes again the site of memory, the site of the backward glance imposing its present-past as a governing matrix over one's psyche and one's culture.[15]

We should not assume that this experience and this tension was limited to Choniates, for only his works have survived. Discussions of the reception of the classical tradition in Byzantium focus on the Constantinopolitan literary elite, and rightly so, because that elite framed the terms of the debate and produced most of the voices in the ongoing conversation. But the Athenians, especially their bishops, had a different relationship to the past than did other Byzantines elsewhere, one defined in material and historical rather than only literary and philosophical terms. Unless Choniates was

[13] Derrida (2002) 6.

[14] Michael Choniates, Protheôria *to the Present Book* 1 (v. I, p. 3); for discussion, see Kaldellis (2007a) 321–322, 327–328.

[15] Gourgouris (1996) 132.

making it all up, the Athenians of the twelfth century were flattered to be told that they were descended from the ancient inhabitants of the city and that they had inherited some of the virtues of those ancients along with their monuments. By contrast, the Hellenist scholars of the capital, both lay and ecclesiastical, did not care to link themselves to antiquity in this way and so their ongoing negotiation of Hellenism, which we regard as normative, did not reflect the special needs of their Athenian contemporaries. So just as we need to adjust views of Byzantine piety to understand what was going on in the Parthenon, so too must we adjust our view of Byzantine classicism to understand what was going on at Athens more generally.

Ancient ruins and the Byzantine beholder: a view of the "sights" in Greece

To suggest that "antiquity," under whatever ideological guise, was implicated in the construction of the Christian Parthenon implies that many Byzantines *were* in fact interested in the ancient monuments, that they cared or thought about them as ancient monuments and were somehow troubled by them. This was not a matter of superstition, as most scholars would have it, but ideology, and it has not been much discussed. The reason for this, apart from the fixation on superstition, has been that the possibility of a deeper engagement in Byzantium with the ruins of antiquity has been ruled out by historians. Commenting on the Athenians of his own time, Gibbon, who had not seen or met them, noted now they "walk with supine indifference among the glorious ruins of antiquity; and such is the debasement of their character that they are incapable of admiring the genius of their predecessors." We should not underestimate how these prejudices served European ideological projects, for example the appropriation of classical culture for the West and its removal from the possession of its "degenerate" custodians. Elsewhere Gibbon makes it clear that the legitimate lines of cultural transmission linked antiquity to the modern nations of Europe and not to Byzantium, which "dishonoured the names of both Greeks and Romans."[16]

It is this model, not a close study of the evidence, that has imposed on us the view subsquently canonized in modern Byzantine Studies by Cyril Mango, which I discussed in the Introduction: "The Byzantines in general did not evince the slightest interest in what we understand by classical Greece."[17]

[16] Gibbon (1995) c. 62 (v. III, 765); cf. c. 48 (v. III, 23–25) and c. 53 (v. III, 419–422).

[17] Mango (1965) 32; see the Introduction and Postscript.

Even "the aesthetic values of landscape had yet to be discovered"[18] – a piece of standard Orientalism undeterred by evidence. This one, at least, is belied by the location of so many Byzantine monasteries: "all the great monasteries of the East seem to have built on amazing sites."[19] Or what are we to make of this scene in the *vita* of Loukas of Steiris (near the coast of Phokis, by the Gulf of Corinth): "they were sitting by the seashore as the sun was streching out its pure rays, gazing intently as the gentle breezes ruffled the waves and taking great pleasure at the sight"?[20]

We suspect that the "secret" of the Parthenon's success was related to its classical past, and that this secret could not be articulated without compromising too many ideological imperatives. A bishop could not very well praise his church by invoking Athena, Perikles, and the glory of pagan Athens, though sometimes Choniates came close to doing just that. The problem we face is the difficulty of documenting an interest in classical antiquities for the middle period and outside the capital, even if we have reason to think that it existed. Sightseeing and travel were not the subjects of any Byzantine literary genre. Most of our sources were written by men educated and usually living in Constantinople, whose purpose was not to give us a sense of local perceptions. But we are not entirely without recourse, and the bits and pieces that we have actually point to a more extensive set of practices and beliefs. Our focus here will be on the monuments of Greece and not on Greek statues in Constantinople, a topic that raises different questions and has been written about more extensively.

It is not only at Athens that we can glimpse local pride in the classical past. Discussing the original conversion of the Parthenon, I drew attention to the fabrication in late antiquity of an oracle in which Apollo allegedly predicted that the Christian God would one day take over the temple of Athens or, in a variant version, the temple of Kyzikos. As it happens we have some interesting evidence from the later history of Kyzikos. In the mid tenth century, Theodoros, the city's bishop, wrote this about Kyzikos to his correspondent, the emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogennetos:

What can I say about my current circumstances? A pestilential and difficult toil! The water is brackish, poisonous, and foul; the wine is common, watery, and cheap; the houses are ruined, the walls have gaps, and there are ruins everywhere and great

[18] Eisner (1991) 34, 41; cf. Casson (1994) 231.

[19] Fermor (1983) 71, who saw with his eyes and not through books. Orientalism: Said (2003) 237: "the Arab is little impressed by scenery," etc.

[20] *Life of Loukas of Steiris* 22 (pp. 36–37). Cf. the chapters on the pleasure of appreciating natural landscapes by Theodoros Metochites, *Aphorisms and Notes* 42–45 (pp. 262–275); for more, see Gregory (2006) 484–485.

pillars; the tombs and *stelai* are overturned and neglected; one sees also the broken fragments of inscriptions, those noble testaments to an ancient happiness that is reflected in the letters and the sheer size of the blocks. And the worse part about it is this, that the only thing that the people can take pride in are the city's first settlers, for they too are reputed to have been from Greece. Otherwise, they are utterly lacking in education and the rest of virtue.[21]

The contours of this lament are quite similar to those produced in Athens by Choniates. In both cases, ruins have a dual effect: they indicate the extent of the current decline while simultaneously hinting at the greatness of what once was. The modern city is dilapidated, but in classical antiquity it must have been majestic. Ancient Greece thereby becomes a standard of natural virtue, an idea of what is possible, its ruins a source of both pride and feelings of inferiority (the Modern Greek dilemma too, in a nutshell). Interestingly, however, Theodoros' complaint reveals that it was widely known among the citizens of Kyzikos, and apparently a source of pride for them, that their city was founded by ancient Greeks, from whom they claimed to be descended. It is difficult to imagine that their contemporaries in Athens did not also feel the same way about their more illustrious ancestors, as Choniates, in his *Inaugural Address*, assumed they did. Both cities took pride in their ancestry and pointed to their monuments as proof. That we are able to gain such glimpses into the provincials' engagements with the ruins of antiquity is extraordinary, given the limitations of our sources; and what we find indicates that these ruins did play a role in how they represented themselves to themselves, in short, in their ideology.

We possess yet another reference to the ruins of Kyzikos. In the eleventh century, the historian Michael Attaleiates noted that an earthquake toppled part of "the Hellenic temple in Kyzikos," which, he goes on to explain, "really used to be something to look at (πρὸς θέαν), given its solid construction, the technical harmony by which it was built out of beautiful and great blocks, as well as on account of its height and size."[22] This aesthetic-architectural account reveals that the temple was a tourist attraction of sorts for the Byzantines. The earthquake alerts us to another factor that probably contributed to the increased prominence of the Parthenon in the eleventh and

[21] Theodoros of Kyzikos, *Letter 1 to the Emperor* (pp. 269–270); see Darrouzès (1960b) 57–61; Saradi-Mendelovici (1990) 58. I will not cite in this connection what the emperor Theodoros II Laskaris (1254–1258) wrote about the ruins of Pergamos, as it does not reveal anything about local attitudes and was produced by a self-consciously Hellenizing ruler: for a translation and discussion, see Kaldellis (2007a) 376–379.

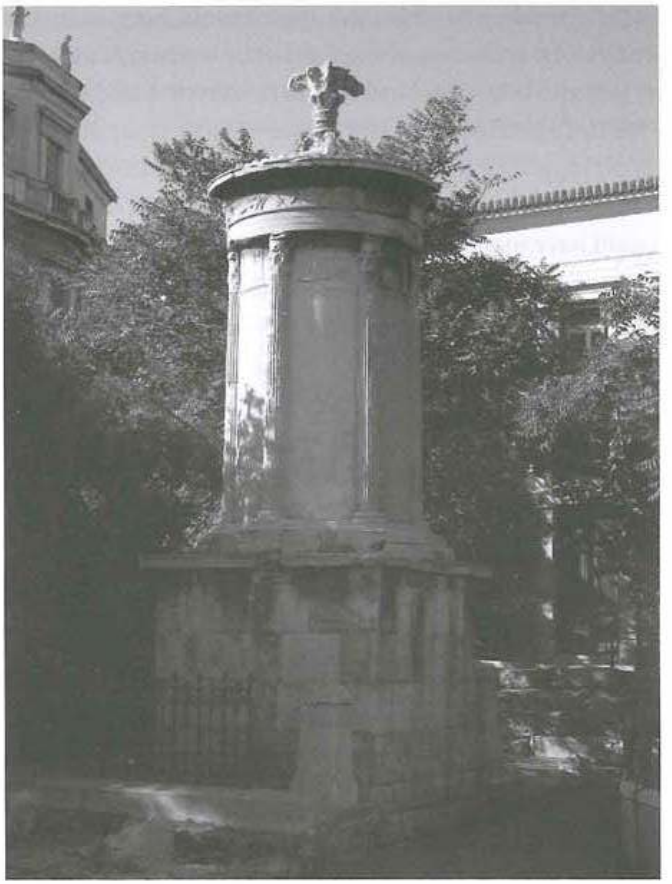
[22] Michael Attaleiates, *History* 90 (p. 67); for references to this temple in antiquity, see the commentary at 274 n. 90; in Byzantium, Rhoby (2003) 235–236.

twelfth centuries. Quite simply, by that time there would have been few pagan temples left standing, and none of the Parthenon's size and magnificence. Neglect, fire, earthquakes, wars, vandals, and fanaticism had destroyed most of them. If the temple of Kyzikos had drawn visitors from afar, and Attaleiates' description suggests it did, after its demise in the eleventh century the Parthenon would have increased in relative importance. Its popularity as a Christian shrine would have increased in this period because of the destruction of competing sites of pilgrimage in the wars in Asia Minor, for example of St. Basileios at Kaisareia in 1067, of the Archangel Michael at Chonai in 1070 and then again a century later, and others.[23]

It is not clear whether Attaleiates is referring to a temple that had been converted into a church or not. Either way, he was interested in it primarily as a *theama*, a "sight." Moreover, from their bishop's letter we can also conclude that the citizens of tenth-century Kyzikos fashioned their local identity at least in part around the city's Greek ruins. This does not mean that they had a Greek identity; they were Romans and Christians above all, but there is room in national and universal identities for local differentiation. Well, if the monuments at Kyzikos elicited such attention, how much more would the Parthenon and all the other antiquities of Athens? Fortunately, we do not have to guess.

Let us take another look at Choniates' *Inaugural Address*, which was his first speech in his new home and might offer some hints as to what he had seen in the first days after his arrival. Choniates begins his oration by thanking the Athenians for organizing a grand reception in his honor. One imagines that he would have been shown around the city. What would that tour have been like? Certainly, the procession would have culminated at the Parthenon, and possibly the townspeople took their new bishop directly there. But there was much more to see in Athens, and a classicist such as he would have had many questions and possibly a mental checklist. We can imagine him pausing to ask about this or that monument. The Athenians must have had ready answers, for Choniates was not the first of his kind. And the *Address* does in fact indicate that he was given a tour of the ancient city immediately upon his arrival. When he turns to the relationship between Athens past and present, he notes that monuments alone do not suffice to establish continuity. "Even if someone were to take me around and point out to me all the landmarks, saying 'This is the Peripatos, this the Stoa, this the Akropolis, the Peiraieus is over there, and this is the Lantern of

[23] Kolia-Dermitzaki (1991) 323–324; and Niketas Choniates, *History* 400, 422.



32 Victory monument of Lysikrates, also known as the Byzantine "Lantern of Demosthenes" (Plaka, Athens).

Demosthenes,' he would not persuade me that I was looking upon actual ancient Athenians [because virtue is also required]."[24]

It seems likely that Choniates had been given just such a tour, and was now, in his first public address to his flock, rephrasing the words of his guides, acknowledging their antiquarian view of the city while placing it into the context of his own broader argument about historical and biological continuity. What clinches this interpretation is his reference to the Lantern of Demosthenes. This monument is first mentioned here, in Choniates' *Address*, and it would have quite a history under this name before modern scholars renamed it the victory monument of Lysikrates (Fig. 32). Choniates could not have known about this Lantern from his classical education, as it is not (and

[24] Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 14 (v. I, pp. 97–98).

could not be) mentioned in any ancient text. It was something the Athenians had invented at some unknown point before his arrival and that he learned about during his first days in Athens. The list in the *Address*, then, is a list of things that he had been shown, not a list of things that he had read about.

The monument of Lysikrates is not among the most impressive remains of classical Athens, which indicates that Choniates had been given quite a thorough tour. What is interesting, from the local point of view, is that the Athenians had felt compelled to invent a name for this odd structure, as they apparently did not know what it really was.[25] It looked like a lantern, so they called it that, and they naturally linked it to one of the great men of ancient Athens, for they probably suspected that this is what visiting dignitaries and classicist-bishops wanted to hear. This decision reveals a sophisticated "tourist" mentality among the local guides. Byzantine Athenians had learned that the best way to present their city to outsiders was to highlight its classical past. Choniates' reference to the Lantern hints at an entire substratum of local antiquarianism and tour-guide performance that is otherwise occluded from Byzantine literature – yet it existed nonetheless.

We can go further and consider that the guides who showed Choniates the Lantern of Demosthenes were not much different from the guides of Athens in the Roman period who pointed out the houses of Sokrates and Demosthenes; the house where Alkibiades profaned the mysteries; and the spot from where Aigeus had jumped to his death when he saw that his son's ship still bore black sails.[26] The fourth-century AD orator Himerios attests that visitors still wanted to see the houses of Demosthenes and Sokrates even though they were humble (certainly by late Roman standards).[27] There was, however, at least one major difference: whereas the guides of Roman Athens were linking old but perhaps otherwise unexceptional sites to names famous from the tradition, the guides of Byzantine Athens were hunting in the tradition to explain actual monuments.[28] It is no accident, then, that we are able to detect the existence of such guides in the twelfth century, when the classical interests of the literary elite in Constantinople peaked again.

The monument of Lysikrates certainly looks like a lantern, but why was it linked with Demosthenes? Well, Plutarch reports that Demosthenes practiced his speeches in an underground chamber that he had built for this purpose, which chamber "is preserved down to our time." When Pytheas, an enemy, scoffed that Demosthenes' speeches smelt of lamp-smoke,

[25] For the monument, see Hurwit (1999) 257.

[26] For these, see Casson (1994) 233–234, 266–267; Jones (2001).

[27] Himerios, *Or.* 64.3.

[28] Cf. ancient Greek identifications of Bronze Age sites, and Roman conjectures about the *lapis niger*: Forsythe (2005) 74.

he replied that his lamp and that of Pytheas witnessed different activities each night. It seems that a monument that looked like a lantern was explained in the twelfth century by reference to the only lantern attested in the ancient sources that was linked to a famous Athenian writer and was also identified by Plutarch as a site that had survived down to his own time – and if to Plutarch's time why not for another thousand years? If this is correct, then even the popular landmarks of Byzantine Athens were based on readings of ancient texts; *scholars* had a hand in identifying them. The Athenians were calling a monument by a name that someone had come up with based on Plutarch, and they had passed it on to Choniates, who provides us with its first attestation in his oration.[29] (We will see in the next chapter that something similar happened with the miraculous lamp in the Parthenon, based this time on what Pausanias had said about the temple of Athena Polias.)

Nor were the Athenians alone in linking their monuments, landscape, and urban topography to the famous men of the past. In the thirteenth century, the scholar Nikephoros Blemmydes claims that while on Samos he stayed in what the locals called "the Cave of Pythagoras" or "of the Philosopher," a monastic retreat, perhaps, but one named after the island's most famous ancient thinker. In a letter to the emperor of Nikaia Theodoros II Laskaris, Blemmydes also related that in a church in the Troad he found a fresco of "a tall armed man bearing the legend: 'the prophet Achilles.'" We saw that the Trojan heroes were still revered by the bishop of Troy in the fourth century, but we cannot bridge the millennium between him and Blemmydes' painters. It was at this time that pagan sages and heroes were being painted on the walls of churches in the Orthodox world.[30] In the mid fifteenth century, the "ignorant populace" of Sparta showed Kyriacus of Ancona both the palace and the portrait of Menelaos, "according to a widespread ancient tradition."[31] Incidentally, it is a western bias that has

[29] Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes* 7.3, 8.3. For a study of the meanings ascribed to the statue of Marcus Aurelius in medieval Rome, in the absence of ancient texts, see Kinney (2002).

[30] Samos: Nikephoros Blemmydes, *A Partial Account* 1.57 (ed. p. 30; tr. p. 76); cf. his *Letter to Patriarch Manuel* (p. 327), tr. and discussed in Munitiz (2003) 371–372. Troad: Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Letter to Theodoros II Laskaris* 23 (p. 310); see Browning (1975) 30, though I do not see any sign that Blemmydes was "horrified." For Troy in the fourth century, see p. 20 above. Images of pagan figures in churches: Brock (1992) 203; Garzya (1992) 36–37.

[31] Kyriacus of Ancona, *Diary* 5.52–53 (pp. 326–327). "Kyriacus" was his own preferred spelling (xx). From the fifteenth century, we also have the account of the antiquities of Athens by the Vienna Anonymous, *The Theaters and Schools of Athens*, on which Setton (1948) 236–238; Mercati (1964); van der Vin (1980) v. I, 309–310; Dagron (1984) 13–15; Hunger (1990) 48; Giakovaki (2006) 251–253. This text must be examined in its own historical context, about which we still know little.

made Kyriacus the "first" modern epigraphist and explorer of antiquities. Consider the scholar Gregorios of Kampsa, who traveled in Greece and Asia Minor in the late ninth century to gather epigram inscriptions (some 200) for what became the *Greek Anthology*. Additional types of creative engagement with ancient inscriptions can be documented from Byzantine Greece and Constantinople.[32]

All this is likely only a glimpse into the bizarre diversity of local identities in Byzantium, whose terms were shaped by the accidents of survival, by history, archaeology, local pride, and memory. These local "Hellenisms" should qualify the assumption that Byzantine interest in the classical past was a function of elite literary culture and so limited to Constantinople. I accepted that assumption in my monograph on *Hellenism in Byzantium*, but realized, as I was writing it, that there is also need for a study of the problem at the local level. Specifically, what was going on in the provinces, beyond the horizon of most Constantinopolitan texts, where identities may have been invested in monuments, local memories, and landscape rather than rhetoric and philosophy? The evidence is fragmentary, but it exists and is slowly being gathered and studied. Amy Papalexandrou, for instance, has studied the ninth-century church of Skripou (Boiotia). Surrounded by the monuments of the Bronze Age and ancient cities, an inscription placed on the church praises the founder Leon in epic hexameters carved in the manner of ancient inscriptions. The poem draws attention to the fact that this was ancient Orchomenos – the evocation of continuity here places Leon's achievements into a more glorious perspective – and uses Homeric language throughout, including Homeric genitives to link past and present pride (παλαιφάτου Ὀρχομένοιο). Even the Theotokos is named

[32] Lauxtermann (2003) 73–74, 184. His ancient counterpart was Polemon of Ilion (ca. 200 BC). In the sixth century, Ioannes Malalas faked having read inscriptions *in situ*: Jeffreys (1990) 200–201. In the ninth, the dedicatory inscription of the Skripou church (in Boiotia) imitated the lettering of ancient inscriptions: Papalexandrou (2003) 67. In the eleventh, Michael Psellos interpreted an inscribed sculpture: *To emperor Doukas, regarding the inscription*; see Dagron (1983); and Dostálová (1986). In Roman Delphi, inscriptions were "performance pieces by guides": Lamberton (2001); possibly also in middle Byzantine Greece. Niketas Choniates, *History* 473, reports that in the late twelfth century Vlach and Cuman raiders were carrying away *stelai* and inscriptions, possibly to provide trophies to adorn their buildings: Papalexandrou (2003) 72 for a ninth-century parallel; at 71 and passim she surveys the uses and readings of ancient inscriptions in middle Byzantium.

Kyriacus has also been called the first to name the citadel of Athens *Akropolis* rather than *kastron*: Moschonas (1996) 149. This is false, as many Byzantine texts attest. In their case it would be labeled "affected classicism," in his "rediscovery." But he went to "wake the dead": Eisner (1991) 13. Cf. Beard (2002) 3–4: Kyriacus "set the tone" of modern eulogy of the Parthenon. On the epigraphical side, he was preceded even in the West by the Anonymous of Einsiedeln.

Iphianassa (probably the Homeric version of Iphigeneia), the roots of which name appear in the *Odyssey* (11.284) linked to Orchomenos![33] Here too we witness the work of a scholar, as with the Lantern of Demosthenes, finding the most relevant passages in ancient texts to give present monuments historical depth.

The recasting of the Theotokos as a pagan figure – harmless, but curious – was similar to the strange synthesis that evolved at Athens and that challenges us to speak about something that was rarely articulated as such in Byzantine texts. What shall we call the clearly non-Christian "supplement" that made the Theotokos of Athens famous? Was it a sense of continuity, whether Hellenic or, more likely, Athenian? A civic pride that transcended the divide between paganism and Christianity? Was it infused with aesthetic appreciation?

Choniates himself quickly learned to exploit Athenian antiquities to make his case before officials. Addressing one of the first governors of Greece he had to deal with, Demetrios Drimys (ca. 1184), he highlighted the city's ruined state, informing Drimys that no matter how hard he looked he would not find any trace of the Heliaia, the Peripatos, or the Lykeion. He could see the now-bare rock of the Areopagos and a small fragment of the Poikile Stoa. In this fantasy of classicism, the topography of the current Byzantine city is set aside in favor of the ancient landmarks that all important visitors expected to "see," a reversal of the actual archaeological situation, where the ancient city lay buried beneath its Byzantine successor. The classicist gaze brought the past to the surface in order to lament its ruin. Unfortunately, we cannot know the degree of imagination involved in this reconstruction. How did Choniates know where to look for the Lykeion? Was his Poikile Stoa the one that archaeologists have excavated from beneath many strata of subsequent occupation? Was some small part of it still visible in the twelfth century, as he believed, even though most of it lay under a few meters of Byzantine occupation?[34] Perhaps the Athenians, enjoying a continuous history since antiquity, remembered where their monuments were and got it right. But invention is not without its compensations for the historian, for it implies that the classicist imperative was so strong in them that they felt the need to have a Poikile Stoa, even if they did not know which one it was exactly.

[33] Papalexandrou (1998) 141–155, esp. 148, 318; (2001a) 242; (2003) 63–67, 69–70; (2007) 171–172; Lauxtermann (2003) 119–120. *Odyssey* 11.284: ἐν Ὀρχομενῷ Μινυείῳ ἴφι ἄνασσεν.

[34] Michael Choniates, *Address to the* praitôr *Demetrios Drimys* 5 (v. I, pp. 159–160). For the Stoa, see p. 114 above.

We should not doubt that members of the Constantinopolitan elite who traveled to Athens were interested in the classical monuments. In the eleventh century, the philosopher and polymath Michael Psellos had excerpted Strabon's account of the city's topography into a separate treatise for the benefit of a friend who "loved not merely Athens but Athenian place-names."[35] Unfortunately, we cannot know whether this friend wanted the treatise as a reference work for his studies or as a manual for a journey to Athens, though in the latter case it would have been practical only to the most classically minded. In a letter, Psellos also noted how disappointed a governor of Athens had been when he finally saw the city to which he had been posted. "Nor could the Poikile Stoa cheer him up, nor the New Academy, not even the Peiraieus." This implies that governors were ordinarily shown these sites, which, apart from the Peiraieus, had nothing to do with their duties. It also implied that *other* governors were pleased or consoled to carry out those duties in the vicinity of those famous places, or at least that Psellos thought they should be. In another letter, he asked an official in Greece to send him statues, which indicates that he may have had a personal collection, as we know he did of icons (for their aesthetic value).[36] Even more interesting in this regard – to finish off the evidence from the eleventh century – is Psellos' funeral oration for a certain official Anastasios, a former student appointed by the emperor to govern Athens (possibly the person for whom Psellos composed the treatise on Athenian place-names). Psellos here praises the city at length for being the sacred place of the Muses. The pretext for Anastasios' residence was public administration, but what he really gained was some rest and relaxation, and reprieve from an illness that he was suffering. Just by being in Athens and walking in Plato's footsteps he understood Plato's thought better. "For these things seem to confer some advantage for understanding those texts." And even his body was strengthened by "the sights of Attica (*theamata*)," a frequent term, as we have seen, for the tourist attractions of Greece.[37]

In the twelfth century, the professor of rhetoric Nikolaos Kataphloron wrote a letter from Constantinople to his friend, the governor of Greece,

[35] Michael Psellos, *On Athenian Place-Names* (pp. 44–48). See Rhoby (2001) 75–91, and Rhoby (2003) 77–80 for Psellos on Athens in general.

[36] Michael Psellos, *Letters S* 33, 141 (pp. 268, 383–384). See de Vries-van der Velden (1996) 133–134; Papamastorakis (2004) 111–127; for collecting in Byzantium, see Mundell-Mango (1995).

[37] Michael Psellos, *Funeral Oration for Anastasios* 97–111 (p. 110). τὸ τῆς Ἀττικῆς τέμενος, etc. (97–98) is a rhetorical way of referring to Athens and not a reference specifically to the Parthenon. Stratis Papaioannou showed me this text on a flight from Birmingham to New York.

asking him to compare the current state of the famous sights of Athens with the way he had imagined them as a student:

> Tell us whether, sojourning in Hellas, you saw the things of your childhood, whether you were able to recognize on sight those things which you contemplated in youth with the eyes of a philosopher [i.e., with imagination]. Tell us if the Enneakrounos [fountain] still flows at Athens. When you have described the Heliaia, tell us whether there is a court of appeal beside the Pnyx. Does an altar to Mercy still stand? Do the Athenians still have an Areopagos? Or has it crumbled and wasted away, so that only a small hill preserves an insignificant remnant?[38]

This testifies to a crucial conceptual development that would not occur in the West until the Renaissance. Classical education here leads to a curiosity about the material remains of antiquity, hinting at an awareness of historical change and a form of archaeological classicism that must have affected how the Parthenon too was viewed. Psellos, we saw above, went so far as to suggest that one's understanding of the classics could be improved by visiting the sights of Athens, though like most Renaissance classicists (and many modern ones too) he himself seems not to have made the journey from Constantinople.[39]

Athens was full of "sights." This is stated in a text we examined earlier, a letter sent in 1154 to Georgios Boutzes, bishop of Athens, by the scholar Georgios Tornikes. Bourtzes had returned from an abortive embassy to Italy. "And now," Tornikes wrote, "instead of telling us all about the Capitolium, the Forum of Appius, and the Three Taverns, which you would have done had you returned out of Italy, indulge in Hellenic sights (*theamata*); instead of that barbarian and arrogant tongue [Latin], take your fill of elegant Attic."[40]

In short, many Constantinopolitan travelers to Greece, whether officials or bishops, knew on the basis of their classical education what Athens was like, and some were disappointed to find it in ruins. What is important for us here, however, is that they had already formed an image of what it was like, or rather of what it *should* have been like. On one reading of his poem, Choniates went so far as to commission a painting of that mental picture, to compensate for the loss of the real thing. Its essential components were the

[38] The letter is still unpublished. This is quoted by Magdalino (1991) 14. For Kataphloron, see Browning (1962–1963) 18–19.

[39] Jerome had argued over six centuries earlier that visiting Athens could benefit historians of Greece just as visiting the Holy Lands benefited Scriptural exegetes: Kelly (1975) 102. It was not until the later seventeenth century that western scholars developed an interest in visiting the site of Athens: Giakovaki (2006).

[40] See pp. 123–124 above.

courts, the speakers' platform, votes, decrees, the council deliberating, festivals, military preparations, and Muses everywhere – just the image one would conjure up on the basis of a classical education.[41] In this respect, cultured Christian Romans like Choniates and Kataphloron prefigured later European travelers:

> When they journeyed to Greece, western travelers felt that they were entering not an alien terrain but a land whose legacy they had absorbed and integrated into the matrix of their own civilization. The contemporary Greek reality that confonted them, however, disoriented them because it diverged vastly from their expectations.[42]

This context of antiquarian curiosity further undermines the notion that the Parthenon was honored in an uncomplicated way as a church of the Mother of God. Some Byzantines were apparently capable on the basis of their education of imagining what ancient Athens looked like. But just as the Parthenon was an aberration among Byzantine churches because it had once been a famous temple, so too was it an aberration among the ancient monuments of Athens because it was now a famous church. As a result of its most peculiar transition, it belonged fully to neither world. In the published excerpt from his letter, Kataphloron does not list it among the things to be nostalgically searched out in Athens. It would be fascinating to know how it was depicted in the painting Choniates had made of the city in its ancient glory. He neglects to mention it in the poem itself. Would its pagan past have been faithfully represented or would it have been suppressed in deference to its current occupant, as too difficult an acknowledgment to make?

To be sure, the passages quoted above pertain mostly to the cultured elite of Constantinople and not the average Athenian or pilgrim to Athens. But, as we saw when we imagined Choniates' arrival at Athens, the expectations and interests of that elite would have powerfully shaped how others, including the Athenians themselves, perceived the city. By constantly "performing" ancient Athens for bishops and visiting officials, local Athenians would have eventually internalized a classicizing view of their own city, assuming that it did not come naturally to them in the first place. A similar phenomenon has been observed in the tourist industry of modern Greece, whose roots lay in the expectations of western travelers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The expectations of valued travelers

[41] See pp. 156–157 above.

[42] Augustinos (1994) x. Cf. how pilgrims in late antiquity had imagined the Biblical narratives and sights that awaited them: Frank (2000) 11.

has historically shaped the way in which locals perceive their own identities, even if they are also capable of maintaining separate and parallel identities to which outsiders are not normally granted access (e.g., the Byzantine, "Romaic," aspects of Greek culture).[43] We can well imagine a class of guides in Byzantine Athens, not, perhaps, professionals like the guides in Constantinople and the Holy Lands (or Athens in Roman times), but men who supplemented their income by showing others around.[44] There was more travel afoot in the Middle Ages and Byzantium than is commonly recognized, much of it involving sightseeing and the appreciation of natural landscapes. In fact, natural curiosity has emerged in recent research as one of the prime motives for pilgrimage, even if it was more practiced than written about.[45] So as not to rehearse a substantial body of evidence, a passage from the beginning of one of Choniates' orations will suffice here:

> Most people who arrive at some city like to inquire out of curiosity about the temper of its climate, its shape and location, and, if it happens to lie on the sea, whether it imports goods from both overland and overseas.[46]

This could have come from any handbook of the early modern European Grand Tour. Nor was it, as we saw, the moderns who first began to carve their names on the Parthenon.[47] And along with asking "out of curiosity" about climate and local economies, we have seen that Byzantine travelers were immensly interested in monuments. In a hagiographic romance of the tenth century, the flagship of the admiral Himerios puts in at Naxos on the way to Crete simply "in order to see (ὀψόμενοι)" the old church there. Having described the properties of the harbor, the author Niketas then provides an *ekphrasis* of the monument that is more architectural and artistic than religious in emphasis.[48]

We have more evidence for the "consumers" of Athenian classicism, the Constantinopolitans who were visiting the city on business, and less for its local "performers." Still, some art-historical and architectural

[43] For theoretical reflections, see Herzfeld (1986) and (1987) 49–56, 101–122; Gourgouris (1996) 143, 150; also Bastéa (2000) 8, 39.

[44] For guides, see Hunger (1978) v. I, 516; Majeska (1984) 44–47 and (2002) 104, 106–107; for ancient Athens, Casson (1994) 264–267.

[45] For pilgrimage and curiosity in the West, see Zacher (1976); Graboïs (1998) 42, 117–133; in Byzantium, Kislinger (1993).

[46] Michael Choniates, *When he traveled to the Euboian Euripos* 1 (v. I, p. 180).

[47] Cf. Eisner (1991) 89; Said (2003) 175.

[48] Niketas Magistros, *Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos* 3–4 (*AS* p. 226; Hero pp. 103–104). I thank Bill Caraher for discussing this episode with me.

evidence survives from Athens which attests to a renewed local interest in classical art. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, marble relief images of sphinxes were popular in the city's churches (Fig. 33); ancient funerary statuary, now sporting Christian allegorical additions, was reused (Fig. 34); a relief of a centaur with a lute was made in the eleventh or twelfth century (Fig. 35) and a set of griffons in the twelfth.[49]

The reuse of ancient sculpture in Byzantine Athens always raises the question of the city's most perplexing monument, the church of the Panagia Gorgoepikoos, "She who answers prayers swiftly," also known as St. Eleutherios or the "Little Metropolis," as it stands directly beside the modern cathedral. This building is unique in that it consists of pagan and Byzantine elements. But as it has recently been redated from the twelfth to the mid to late fifteenth century, I have deferred its discussion to an appendix.

The evidence I have reviewed refutes the idea that the Byzantines, as true orientals, were not interested in the antiquities that lay about them, which had to await the arrival of western travelers to be "discovered." But we should not get carried away and ascribe to them the obsession with antiquities that is sympomatic of modern civilization. The Byzantines may have been interested in classical antiquities – and interested in them precisely because they were classical antiquities – but they lacked that notion of secular holiness that informs modern archaeolatry. Greek ruins were one set of interesting things in a world with many other interesting (and more holy) things. They could be modified, demolished, or restored, as need demanded. Writing upon them was not regarded with sanctimonious horror; quite the contrary, that was usually an expression of piety, and we have no evidence for vandalism. The destruction of antiquities by Christian fundamentalists in the early period was not vandalism; it was holy war. Vandalism and archaeolatry on the other hand are the complementary symptoms of modernity.

Conclusion: archaeology, polysemy, success

We have, then, evidence from the eleventh and twelfth centuries for a fairly widespread interest in the archaeological remains of the former Greek world, contrary to what many historians have declared. The testimony of Theodoros of Kyzikos suggests that this interest may be pushed back at least

[49] Sklavou-Mauroeidi (1999) sphinxes: 104–106, 116–118; funerary statuary: 107; centaur: 157; griffons: 158–159. For Byzantine centaurs, see Dark (2001) 106–109.

33 Middle Byzantine panel with sphinxes (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

34 Reused classical relief (funerary, fourth century BC) with secondary Byzantine ivy carving, possibly allegorical, on the left side (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

to the early tenth century, that is to the time when the Parthenon was emerging as one of the main destinations of Byzantine pilgrims. His testimony also indicates that this interest was not limited to the educated class but was an expression of the civic pride of the Byzantine towns. I have suggested that tourist performance could have "translated" the classical preoccupations of the elite into local identities, or into modalities of local identities. Alongside the more national Roman and universal Christian identities of the provincial subjects of Byzantium, there were also civic loyalties which, in Greece, were partly linked to archaeology. They knew what those monuments were. Granted, they may have called the victory monument of Lysikrates the Lantern of Demosthenes, but they knew that it was a proud relic of ancient Greece which had to be treated with respect because it was somehow linked to certain famous men: writers, orators, or philosophers. It is simply not the case, then, as so many historians have claimed, that medieval people "had no perception of history as

35 Byzantine centaur with lute and female dancer (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens).

archaeology."[50] The obstacle that we face has to do with the scarcity of our evidence and is not a conceptual limitation in the minds of our subjects. Athens may have had a well-developed tourist infrastructure, but we would not necessarily hear about it from the kinds of sources that we must work with. All we have are hints and traces. But those tell us much about the context of viewing the Parthenon in Byzantine Athens. The Parthenon was not just any church, because it was an ancient temple and monument and therefore partially fell under a different category. But it was also not just any ancient monument, because it was also a church to the Theotokos and received the sincere devotion of thousands.

What, then, was the "meaning" of the Parthenon in Byzantium? On one level, it was a most Christian shrine of the Mother of God, who was adored there by emperors, monks, and pilgrims from all over Christendom, from England to Armenia. But the light of the Parthenon was a composite of different beams, and we should not focus exclusively on the one that comes from the Church's official spokesmen. When a Byzantine looked at the

[50] Agapitos (1994) 6, citing C. Mango; cf. Mango (1994).

Parthenon he saw (as we do not) a church of the Theotokos. But that was not all that he saw. He knew, or could tell merely by looking at it, that it had once been something else. Even the pediment sculptures were still there, Athena and Poseidon above the main entrance to the church. That elusive "something else" raises many related questions, for example about the place of Athens, both old and new, in the cultural topography of the Byzantine empire, between Jerusalem and Constantinople; about the reception of classical ideals in a post-classical world; about the role of ancient monuments in fashioning civic identities.

Through the Parthenon, Athens managed to retain a voice in the ongoing evolution of cultural ideals, even in a Christian world. The monument had many different possible meanings, and one of the mechanisms of its success, I suspect, was that all of these possible meanings were promoted by its custodians, even if they were contradictory of each other. Emperors, monks, classicists, tourists, and local Athenians were encouraged to read their own satisfactions into it. Yet some things did not have to be literally *said* to be "promoted." There was, for instance, no need to talk about its pagan past and glory, because these were evident to all. It made sense instead to promote its Christian virtues, as those especially needed to be broadcast given the ambivalent image that had emerged regarding Athens in some circles. No interpretation was ruled out, except the literal pagan one, but no one was interested in that after AD 550. Each visitor was enabled and perhaps encouraged to make of it what he would. Like Tornikes, or Choniates in some of his moments, you could see it as a monument of the triumph of Christianity over paganism, of the Theotokos over Athena, and carve on it the rallying cry *Iesous Christos nika*.[51] Or, like the author of the *Theosophy*, Theodoros Prodromos, and pope Innocentius III (or, as the case may be, the emperor Manuel I Komnenos), you could frame it in the context of Athenian history, culture, and thought, and see in its transformation an evolution that culminated in Christ but that also redeemed antiquity, after a fashion. Choniates operated in different modes, depending on the context or his mood. The way he expressed the temple's polysemy was perhaps characteristic of the strategies pursued by the temple's custodians during the seven centuries of its existence as an Orthodox church. Perhaps they realized that what they had to say about it was complemented by what it had to say for itself, something that they, at any rate, could not quite put into words.

Ferdinand Gregorovius expressed one side of this dynamic when he said that "the church of the Parthenon proved that the significance that was

[51] Orlandos with Branouses (1973) 83, 91–92 (nos. 90, 103, 105).

attached to the land of Greece existed solely in relation to the tradition of ancient paganism."[52] This was true: antiquity was always present in Byzantine Greece even if its ideological expressions were subliminal. But still, this interpretation is too compromised by the romantic Hellenism of Gregorovius' view of Byzantine Greece and it is also too reductionist, as it does not account for the "surface" of things, the genuine adoration of the Theotokos that took place in the Parthenon. It was rather the *asymmetrical* fusion of two elements, the charged dynamic of their perpetual interplay, that proved to be the key to Athens' success in the post-classical Christian world.

[52] Gregorovius (1904) v. I, 161; cf. the dilemma posed by Setton (1975b) III 180, quoted in the Introduction, above.

8 | The light of the Christian Parthenon

Beyond the fact of its success, the greatest mystery that surrounds the Christian Parthenon is the "divine" light that was said by so many different visitors and commentators to emanate in or from the building. This theme has surfaced often in our narrative of the shrine's history and it is time to tackle it head-on. But the high level of rhetorical variation and allusion in many of our accounts makes it difficult to understand the reality behind it. Let us summarize what we have heard so far.

Chronologically, the first mention of the light that I have found is made by the Anglo-Saxon pilgrim Saewulf (1102–1103), according to whom the Parthenon contained a lamp that burned eternally without need for fuel. It is unclear whether he saw it himself and had it explained to him in Athens or heard about it elsewhere from someone who was not necessarily an "authorized" spokesman for the church. In 1119, the Italian geographer Guido noted the inextinguishable divine light that shone in the temple and the shining marble out of which it had been built; his account does not necessarily imply that the two were related. It is interesting that our first two sources are western. This implies that the light had made its appearance in the Parthenon at least as early as the mid to late eleventh century, to allow time for its fame to reach western texts, and possibly earlier.

Our sources for the twelfth century are Byzantine and include: Tornikes' reference to the "divine light which is but an outflow of that pre-eternal light that has come to earth"; Malakes' praise of the bishop, Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites, for making the Parthenon "gleam with golden plates, so that both the temple and the sacrificer might shine brightly in the sight of the most pure Parthenos"; the wide and complex range of images that Eustathios deployed in his oration for Hagiotheodorites, including both metaphors such as "the torch of wisdom" and objective references to the "light ever-lasting, ever-burning, and unquenchable … an outflow of the divine light that could be found *there*," language that he then transferred to his subject, making Hagiotheodorites himself shine with a light that rivaled that of the Parthenon; Michael Choniates' references in his letters to the fiery grace that permeated the Parthenon and the energies that it emitted to all those who entered; his reference in the oration to Stryphnos to

"the sacred light that burns without wood and without the sun" and to the golden dove that was suspended over the altar; his claim that Stryphnos' wife had traveled to Athens to be "filled with the flashes that illuminate it [i.e., the Parthenon]"; and his long and powerful description at the end of his *Inaugural Address* of the light that fell from heaven to flash forth from the Parthenon to the entire world.

It is not clear what we are supposed to make of all this. Where are we to begin unraveling the tangle of specific information, allusions, metaphors, literary inventiveness, and theological exposition? For instance, it is not clear when these authors are describing something specific about the temple, perhaps a light that shone inside, and when they are engaging in rhetorical elaboration. Where did the perceptible reality of the miraculous light end and the literary image begin? If there was a lamp that burned "eternally" inside the Parthenon, in describing it, or rather in alluding to it, these orators tended to blur the distinctions between it and the imagery that may have been derived from the famous light of the Attic sky or the dazzling colors given off at different times of the day by the Parthenon itself. The light of the Attic sky had been noted in antiquity, for instance by Ailios Aristeides, a key orator in the Byzantine rhetorical curriculum. "Although the air of all Attica is perfect," he wrote, "that over the city is the best and purest. You could recognize the city at a distance by the air overhead, which is like a crown of light." The modern Athenian may laugh or cry at this, but from antiquity to the mid twentieth century the impression was consistent. In a letter, Eustathios compared the "Kimmerian" lands of Makedonia to the "sunny and clear land of Greece." And the national modern Greek poet Kostis Palamas praised the light of Athens and the "bright-browed temple" in his epic *The King's Flute*, whose theme was Basileios II's visit to the city in 1018.[1]

Even today, there are days when the sky over Attica remembers its former glory. As for the Parthenon, it still gleams brightly over the city when dawn hits it from over Mt. Hymettos, while in the evening it becomes like a dull yellow star even after the rest of the city below has passed into shadow. And the interior of the church would have been brightly illuminated by shafts of light entering from the windows in the apse (in the morning) and the windows in the upper gallery (in the south and north). Unfortunately, we cannot now calculate the interplay between this natural light and the

[1] Ailios Aristeides, *Panathenaic Oration* 353; Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Letter* 45 (Tafel p. 349); cf. also the comic poet in Dion Chrysostomos (?), *Oration* 64 *(On Fortune II)* 16 = Kock (1976) v. III, 471 (fr. 340). Palamas (1989) *Ἡ φλογέρα τοῦ βασιλιά* 7.1–24; tr. Will (1967) 123.

mosaics and icons of the interior.[2] But no natural association, literary image, or miracle could be more appropriate for this building than that of light, and it seems to have been a Byzantine innovation. (In antiquity the interior illumination would have been of a very different nature, as light from the main eastern door reflected off the pool before the gold and ivory statue of Athena.) In connection with the Parthenon, the theme first emerges in Byzantium. Given that the theology of light was being highly developed during the middle Byzantine period, it is no accident that the light of the Parthenon was imbued by the orators with mystical and divine qualities.

Beginning in the twelfth century, this image continued without significant breaks to be associated with the Parthenon down to the modern period, by which time its Byzantine origin had been forgotten. In 1395, during the Latin period, Niccolò da Martoni noted a chink in the wall through which light always poured into the temple, as if from a fire that burned continuously. It was believed, he says, that a saint was buried there. A commentator speculates that this may have been a window "shut off by means of a thin slab of Kappadokian marble."[3] Modern visitors have tended to emphasize rather the exterior brightness of the building (as had Choniates). Here is Edward Lear:

> The manner that huge mass of rock – the Acropolis – stands above the modern town with its glittering white marble ruins against the deep blue sky is quite beyond my expectations ... Most of the columns being rusty with age, the whole mass becomes like gold and ivory – and the polished white marble pavement is literally blue from the reflection of the sky.

And Henry Miller:

> Light acquires a transcendental quality: it is not the light of the Mediterranean alone, it is something more, something unfathomable, something holy. Here the light penetrates directly into the soul, opens the doors and windows of the heart, makes one naked, exposed, isolated in the metaphysical bliss which makes everything clear without being known.[4]

[2] For a study of light in the Sinai church, see Nelson (2006) 16–32; in general, James (1996) 4–8; Theis (2001) 54–57 on windows and architecture; Piotrowski (2000) on light and marble. I thank Rob Nelson and Liz James for these references.

[3] Text: Le Grand (1895) 652; commentary: van der Vin (1980) v. I, 200; v. II, 617.

[4] Quoted in Eisner (1991) 156, 195; cf. 129, 166; see also Chateaubriand in Augustinos (1994) 223; and others in Leontis (1995) 40 n. 2, 52, 55, and later by Greeks: 84. The theme is a cliché in novels set in Athens.

Neither Lear nor Miller had read Choniates or were directly aware of the Byzantine tradition regarding the Parthenon's light. We might be tempted to view their existential raptures exclusively in the context of Romanticism and the increasingly elaborate aesthetization of the land of Greece in modern times, but that would be to ignore the Byzantine origin of the theme, which everyone has been happy to do so far. Yet it is possible that the theme of the Parthenon's light was passed down more or less continuously from the twelfth to the twenty-first century by a combination of local tradition, which presented travelers with some version of the tale, and of western travel writers copying each other's narratives (as we know happened and continues to happen).

A miraculous light, as we have seen, was visible to Niccolò in 1395. When the antiquarian Kyriacus of Ancona visited the site in 1444 – Athens was under Florentine control – he too referred to the "bright citadel" of the city.[5] He was the first to suppress all reference to its history as a church and view it as a purely classical monument (a distortion that classicists in the nineteenth century made into an archaeological reality by removing all the monument's post-classical accretions). Western interest in the state of Athens picked up again in the later seventeenth century, and it seems that the "light" survived this transition too. In 1672, after the Parthenon had been converted to a mosque, Jacques Paul Babin mentioned a block of "transparent marble" in the temple's wall that was believed by some to have been blessed by St. Paul (apparently it glowed red). Babin attributed it to the sun. Two years later, André Georges Guillet referred to "une lueur extraordinaire nous étonna" and "une grande lumiere" given off by miraculous blocks and lamps in the building. Two years after that, Jacob Spon and George Wheler denied that this was a miracle, giving a naturalistic explanation.[6] It was not until after the Romantic age that the Parthenon's light again elicited deeply emotional effects as it had in Choniates. By then, however, no one was interested in the building's Christian past and no one was aware of the Byzantine accounts of the divine light.

Those interested in the Byzantine experience must now ask, what was that light? It does not seem to me, at any rate, that the light of the Parthenon alluded to by the orators of the twelfth century was merely a

[5] Kyriacus of Ancona, *Letter* 3 (pp. 16–17).

[6] Testimonia in Michaelis (1870–1871) 337, 338, 343. For the French and English travelers, see Augustinos (1994), esp. 95–99, 109–112; Beard (2002) 72–73, including the Turkish writer Çelebi; and Giakovaki (2006) 274–285 (who documents and attempts to explain the gap in western interest). For semi-translucent marble in Byzantine church architecture, see Piotrowski (2000) 112–116.

theological-rhetorical way of talking about the natural appearance of the building or the bright Attic sky, a rhetoric that would culminate after a long history and many transformations in the aesthetic-existential narratives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That would be an evasion of the problem. The interplay of color, marble, and sky may have enhanced the Byzantine miracle and given it a grander dimension, but there can be little doubt that a specific light lay behind all the accounts. Saewulf, our first source and a very pedestrian one in such matters, refers simply to an ever-burning lamp, and later Byzantine sources also refer to a light that required no fuel and burned continuously. One would not refer with wonder to the colors of the Parthenon or the Attic sky as requiring no fuel or sun. Moreover, it is easy to see how, from a lamp that was kept inside the building and was believed to burn eternally, the orators could develop those elaborate theological light-images that encompassed the entire temple. The Parthenon's own color contributed to this rhetorical development, but probably did not give rise to it. Besides, most of the expositions assume that the audience knows what the miraculous light-source was, and refer to it casually or only in allusions. This is perhaps because a mere lamp, even a very extraordinary, elaborate, and luxurious lamp, was not the kind of object that could by itself bear the weight of the theological rhetoric that is heaped up in the texts. Best to keep it out of the oration and only allude to it. Moreover, an ever-burning lamp would be easy to maintain on a practical level too.[7]

And so we run into the problem of artificial classicism all over again. This is because, after leaving the Parthenon, the ancient periegete Pausanias discusses a few of the dedications standing about on the Akropolis, and then turns to the Erechtheion, which most scholars agree was the same building as the temple of Athena Polias, in which the most ancient and by far the most important image of the goddess was kept; in fact, the only one to which religious reverence was paid in antiquity. Pausanias' account is generally confusing, but at this point he adds the following bit of information:

> Kallimachos made a golden lamp for the goddess. They fill this lamp with oil and then wait until the same day of the following year, for the oil suffices for the interval, even though it burns both day and night. The wick is of Karpasian flax, which is the only variety of flax that is immune to fire [presumably asbestos]. A bronze palm tree above the lamp draws the smoke up to the roof [i.e., it was hollow].

[7] For artificial light in Byzantine churches, lamps, and candles, see Theis (2001) 57–63.

This was apparently an item of major importance, for the geographer Strabon had described Athens in the following way:

> The city itself is a rock in a field surrounded by houses. On the rock is the sacred shrine of Athena, both the ancient temple of the Polias, in which burns the lamp that is never extinguished, and the Parthenon, which Iktinos made and which contains the ivory statue of Athena made by Pheidias.

And Plutarch, in his biography of the early Roman king Numa, mentioned that the sacred lamp with the fire that is never extinguished was tended at Athens by widows. When it went out by accident, as it did during the tyranny of Aristion (early first century BC), it had to be relit from the rays of the sun and not from another fire.[8]

We have here a classical lamp very similar to the one that is described by Saewulf and presupposed in Byzantine accounts of the light of the Parthenon, only this lamp was in the temple of Athena Polias rather than in the temple of the Parthenos. Moreover, the lamp of Athena seems not to have been miraculously inextinguishable, it was simply not extinguished (except under Aristion); unlike the Christian lamp of the Parthenon, it definitely required fuel, though only once a year. But these are minor points compared to the extraordinary similarity between the two lamps. The greatest obstacle in the way of postulating any kind of cultic continuity is the 900-year gap between Pausanias and Saewulf, which is probably too large to bridge. It can be shortened somewhat because Saewulf's reference is only a *terminus ante quem*. At the other end, we can suppose that the lamp of Athena continued to be relit every year at least down to the closing of the pagan Akropolis in the late fifth century. The references to this lamp in the epic poem *Dionysiaka* of Nonnos of Panopolis (first half of the fifth century) are not necessarily contemporary as they are set into a mythological narrative.[9] Could the lamp of Athena Polias have then been moved to the Parthenon and reconsecrated to the Theotokos along with the rest of that building in the late fifth century? It has in fact been conjectured that the cult of Athena Polias was transferred from the Erechtheion to the Parthenon at some point in late antiquity.[10] We are on very unsteady ground. It is likely that the lamp of the Christian Parthenon owed something to the lamp of Kallimachos, but what?

[8] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.26.6–7; Strabon, *Geography* 9.1.16; Plutarch, *Numa* 9.10–12 and *Sulla* 13.3; cf. Palagia (1984); Hurwit (1999) 200–202; Lesk (2004) 130–138. For Aristion, see Habicht (1997) c. 13; for the cult of Athena Polias, Papachatzis (1992–1993).

[9] Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaka* 27.115, 27.320, 33.123.

[10] Mansfield (1985) 203, though the evidence is negative; Lesk (2004) 305.

Though it is impossible to be certain, given the state of our evidence, it is likely that we are dealing with another antiquarian revival. At some point before Saewulf's visit, the custodians of the Christian Parthenon equipped their temple with an "inextinguishable" lamp. It is in the early Middle Ages that we first hear about the "regular" miracles that occurred at the major sites of pilgrimage in the Byzantine world, such as the myrrh that flowed from the tomb of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike. The guardians of the Parthenon may have decided to endow their shrine with a miraculous attraction, one moreover that would be relatively easy to maintain. In doing so, they certainly had in mind that ancient lamp made by Kallimachos for Athena Polias. The coincidence would otherwise be too great. Either the memory of the ancient lamp had survived, or else they knew the text of Pausanias or some other antiquarian. This is plausible. The tenth century witnessed a revival of antiquarianism and encyclopedism in Byzantium, and made heavy use of the texts of Pausanias, Strabon, and Plutarch. Pausanias was used in the compilation of that great dictionary of classical studies, the *Souda*.[11] This interpretation is reinforced by the testimony of Saewulf, who provides the most literal account of the miraculous light of the Parthenon. His account can in fact be reconciled with the later flights of the bishops' rhetoric. But the Anglo-Saxon pilgrim obviously did not know Pausanias. He reported what he saw or had been told, and he reads almost like a paraphrase of Pausanias on the lamp of Athena Polias.

In promoting the Christian Parthenon in this way, its custodians again looked back to the city's pagan past as that was recorded in classical sources. Something similar may have happened, as we saw, in the naming of the "Lantern of Demosthenes." Interestingly, the "miracle" that they settled on in this case – an ever-burning lamp – reinforced the links between the temple and the church in a way that was religiously neutral. Its light did not depend on the relics of a saint or on a miracle performed by any Christian figure. It was eternal not only in the sense that it never went out but also because it transcended the cardinal division between the pagan past and the Christian present, bringing the temple's past into line with its current status as an important Christian shrine – or vice versa. The light was bright but ambivalent, like the Parthenon itself.

Consider again, for instance, the end of Choniates' *Inaugural Address*. In this speech, as we have seen on pp. 158–160, the newly appointed bishop of Athens insists on the triumph of the Mother of God over Athena, more than he would in later works. But, paradoxically, triumphalist rhetoric again and

[11] See Diller (1956); on encyclopedism in general, Lemerle (1986) c. 10 (268 for Pausanias).

inevitably revives that which it seeks to supplant. Choniates wants to praise the pure Christian credentials of his new cathedral, but what he ends up doing is telling us that it was once the cult center of two goddesses, Hestia and Athena, and he offers us a considerable amount of detail about their worship. Here, again, is the relevant passage (he is referring to the Parthenon and the Akropolis in general):

this light-receiving and ever-shining place, where the unquenchable fire of Hestia used to be tended, a bright torch of impiety one might call it.[12] That was back when he who became the lucifer of darkness, who gave substance to darkness and fled from the light, led the Athenians of those times astray from the truth, by making it seem that the leader of darkness is a source of light. But, indeed, ever since the sun of justice dawned from that ever-virginal maiden, the deceitful and gloomy fire was extinguished, made as dim as the light of a fire-fly by the bright rays of the sun. For they say that the lamps of the sinners are going out.[13] And this Akropolis was liberated from the tyranny of the false Parthenos Athena; no longer is the fire on her altar fed sleeplessly. Now it is the ever-shining torch of the eternal Parthenos and Mother of God that is held up on this peak as though from heaven itself. It does not illuminate only the city and the land beyond Attica, but as much of the earth as the sun traverses. Truly, this was where the darkness of imposture was abundant.[14]

Much of the imagery and vocabulary becomes intelligible if there was in fact a miraculous lamp, a burning flame, inside the Christian Parthenon. The rhetoric of light in Choniates' speech would not have taken the specific directions that it does here otherwise.

We see immediately how unsuitable the imagery of light is to the rhetoric of triumph. The pagans had light and the Christians now have light, and light is light, there is no good light and bad light. So Choniates calls the pagan light "a torch of impiety," which is simply abuse; he then suggests that the light of the "light-bringer" is in fact darkness, a theologically induced paradox that defeats the imagery; and finally he says that the light of the Mother of God is brighter than her rival's, which is just lame, in part because it tacitly concedes that the pagan light was bright too. His positive portrayal of the "good" light is edifying and even powerful, but when he tries to contrast it with the "bad" light he runs into the limits of his imagery. We are left with a striking sense of continuity of worship at the site: one Parthenos succeeds another in the same temple and one ever-burning flame takes the

[12] Choniates is alluding to Plutarch's *Numa* (9.11–12), which discusses the women who kept the sacred fire at Rome, Delphi, and Athens. See Rhoby (2002) 108–109.

[13] Cf. Proverbs 24.20; Matthew 25.8.

[14] Michael Choniates, *Inaugural Address at Athens* 32–34 (v. I, p. 104).

place of another. The rhetoric of triumph contains the seeds of its own demise. Choniates wants to focus his audience's attention on St. Paul's exhortations and finds himself citing Plutarch's accounts of pagan cults!

We cannot know exactly when or how there came to be such a lamp in the Christian Parthenon nor the motives and devices of those who put it there. But my argument for self-conscious antiquarianism is strengthened by a literary device that was used in the twelfth century for addressing the bishops of Athens. In many letters and orations, they are compared to the Altar of Mercy (*Eleos*, also Christian pity and compassion) established by the ancient Athenians. Just as Paul had once tried to teach the pagan Athenians the truth that lay behind their Altar to the Unknown God – a pagan altar redeemed by a Christian message – so too did the Byzantine orators now redeem the inner meaning of the ancient Altar of Mercy, by showing how this or that bishop of Athens had perfected the virtue of compassion. What the ancient Athenians had wrongly taken to be a divine figure was now recast and revered as a manifestation of Christian pity. "You became a living Altar of Mercy for the Athenians," wrote Euthymios Malakes about Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites. "You are a truer Altar of Mercy than the one set up by the Athenians," he would write later to Michael Choniates.[15] Eustathios went so far as to claim that in their worship of Zeus and in the setting up of the Altar of Mercy, the Greeks revealed that they dimly perceived what Christians now know clearly. He even suggested that the Christians had literally "picked up" where the Greeks had left off. This was a man who could make room in heaven for virtuous pagans. Michael Choniates, like his teacher, likewise approved what the ancients had done in this regard.[16] As in many others ways, ancient Athens is redeemed on the theological level as well because it prefigured Christianity.

I have insisted on this Altar because all these orators and bishops could have known about it only from Pausanias, or only from sources that derived from Pausanias, such as the dictionary *Souda*. We have here a clear case of the virtues and attributes of Christian Athens being recast from pagan texts. This is not "continuity," at least not what is normally meant by that word. It is a very self-conscious revival of an ancient cultural institution that is given a new albeit closely related meaning. As with the Parthenon itself and its

[15] E.g., Georgios Tornikes, *Letter* 8 to the bishop of Athens (Georgios Bourtzes) (p. 121); Euthymios Malakes, *Letter* 9 to the bishop of Athens (Michael Choniates) (p. 99); idem, *Funeral Oration for Nikolaos Hagiotheodorites* 1, 5 (pp. 155, 158).

[16] Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Exercise on the "Kyrie eleêson"* (Wirth p. 68; cf. also *Or.* 18, p. 307). For Eustathios and the ancient Greeks, see Kaldellis (2007a) 307–316. Michael Choniates, *Letter* 139 (pp. 226–227).

miraculous light, the Altar of Mercy was another way for Christian Athens to associate itself directly with the best that its classical past had to offer. The Altar was desirable for this purpose not only because it was dedicated to *Eleos*, which must have made the ancient Athenians seem prescient and virtuous to their Christian descendants. For the deeper reason why the Altar evoked such positive responses, we again need to look no further than the key passage in Pausanias:

> There are other things too in the Athenian agora that are not famous among other people, such as the Altar of Mercy. Only the Athenians among the Greeks pay honor to this god, who is most beneficial for human life, given the vicissitudes of fortune. The Athenians are famous not only with respect to their love of humanity, they also worship the gods more piously than do others.[17]

Pausanias himself had already drawn regarding pagan Athens the conclusion that so many Byzantines would later come to believe regarding the Athenians of their own time. The Athenians were the most pious among the Greeks. Perhaps only names had changed, and in some respects not even the names.

A brighter miracle could not have happened at Athens. The imagery of light enhanced the city's natural features, the Attic sky, and the Pentelic marble of its defining monuments. While it enabled the Parthenon to rival other sites of pilgrimage which featured miracles of illumination (as we saw in Tornikes' letter to Bourtzes), it also delicately linked Christian Athens to its pagan antecedents in a way that was religiously inoffensive. And it led naturally into the rhetoric of the city as the birthplace of philosophy and rhetoric, the city that had illuminated the world with wisdom (as in Eustathios' eulogy of Hagiotheodorites). Choniates deployed almost all of these rhetorical modes in his raptures on the temple of the Atheniotissa. And, we must note again, the theme of light is deployed in relation to the building itself and less so to the Theotokos who was honored in it. While the Theotokos could be said to have been the gate through which Light came into the world,[18] in the case of Athens that function was performed by the Parthenon. The Parthenon and all that it signified (but never openly evoked) remained at the center of attention.

[17] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.17.1; cf. 1.24.3; cf. Sophokles, *Oedipus at Kolonos* 260; pseudo-Plato, *Alkibiades II* 148e; Diodoros of Sicily, *Historical Library* 13.22.7; Josephos, *Against Apion* 2.130; Statius, *Thebaid* 12.481–511. The altar (*eleou bômos*) has an entry in the *Souda*, but the text of it is missing (v. II, p. 243).

[18] E.g., Lauxtermann (2003) 122.

To conclude, "Athens" was a potent sign that could not be dismissed. It stood for a set of ideals that few wished to entirely abolish. Granted, there were always those like Romanos Melodos, the poet of the Akathistos Hymnos, and Ioannes Geometres, who gloated at the great city's alleged demise. But Athens had the last laugh, even in their own very Christian world. An alternative and more conciliatory tradition prevailed, one that was first formulated by St. Paul when he called attention to the Altar of the Unknown God in order to introduce his new message; later by those Athenians who gently and quietly converted the Parthenon into a church while preserving its distinctive civic importance; by all who believed that ancient philosophy and even religion had foreshadowed the faith and hence had earned a right to be remembered and commemorated; and by those who relit the lamp of the temple of Athena and invoked the Altar of Mercy for Christian use and edification. Hellenism and Christianity developed a unique relationship that followed different rules at Athens than it did elsewhere.

The Athens of Perikles, Plato, and Athena, a city that was at the same time an ideal, never completely surrendered to Christianity and could never be fully subdued by it, at least not without being completely destroyed first, and there was too much love and respect for it to do that. It remained a place where a complex set of values were negotiated and brought to terms, not, to be sure, on a basis of equality and symmetry, but still a compromise was reached in which the victor showed more magnanimity and gratitude than elsewhere. The time has come to recognize the amazing feat of cultural innovation that was accomplished by the Christians of Byzantine Athens and their bishops, learned and decent men like Michael Choniates. The Christian Parthenon deserves more and better than it has received. It was not only ahead of its time in pointing to later developments, it stands as a monument of original cultural synthesis under some of the most difficult historical circumstances that can be imagined.

Postscript: some Byzantine heresies

The following thoughts do not constitute a proper Conclusion. My historical conclusions are stated in the body of the text and I do not wish to repeat them here. I have reserved this space for irony and marginal comment, for Byzantine reflections on an important monument and its history. The Parthenon has been hailed as the apogee of ancient architecture since it was discovered by modern scholars at the end of the seventeenth century (not earlier, as is often believed),[1] and it has been appropriated by the modern Greek nation for the articulation of its complex historical ideology. It is more visited, studied, admired, and written about today than it ever was, which makes it a modern monument too. It is both modern and ancient as it is both universal and particular.[2] It lends itself easily to diachronic treatment and the study of its reception, of "past" and "present."[3]

But which past? Byzantium has been completely cut out of this picture, even though it not only preserved the monument but contributed decisively to placing it on a pedestal for the world's adoration. The history of the Parthenon (and of Athens) has to be rewritten. The narrative of classical "glory," medieval "decline," and modern "discovery" has to be replaced with one in which the pagan Parthenon takes a more modest place among the many monuments of the ancient city; in which its fame and religious importance grows steadily during the Byzantine period, eclipsing everything else in Athens, until it *slowly* enters the imagination of western Europe (as late as the late seventeenth century). It was during the Byzantine period that the Parthenon became an important site of religious pilgrimage and antiquarian curiosity and a site where the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity was creatively renegotiated. The credit does not go to European colonial (and other) travelers. They did not "discover" the Parthenon and the ruins of Athens. The Byzantines were just as engaged with the monument, its history, and its surroundings; in fact, they provided much of the basis for its later reception.

[1] See now Giakovaki (2006) for the long gap in western interest after Kyriacus.

[2] Cf. Yalouri (2001); Hamilakis (2007) 274–277, 297; nineteenth century: Bastéa (2000) 100.

[3] E.g., Tournikiotis (1996); Neils (2005).

But the history of Athens is central to many broader narratives about the cultural history of the West. A change in this particular can and should affect our understanding of the overall reception of the classical tradition. We must restore Byzantium to its place in that history by recognizing that its contribution went beyond the function of preservation, which has been viewed largely as passive. Most surveys skip from antiquity to the Renaissance and the rise of the modern antiquarian disciplines, constructing a narrative that validates specific modern ideologies linked to the emergence of the nation-states, their colonial hegemony over non-classical portions of the world, and the project of scientific and social progress. During the past few decades, much critical scholarship has shown how antiquity, or an image of it stressing order, rationality, and the superiority of the "free peoples" of the world, was drafted into the service of justifying European expansion and bolstering negative views of the South, the Muslim world, New World, Far East, and the Europeans' own medieval past. Though this aspect has been far less explored, Byzantium in particular was targeted by the thinkers of the Enlightenment as a period of decline for the legacy of classical antiquity. Its successor Orthodox peoples were held to be uninterested in the monuments that surrounded them, giving Europeans, the true heirs of antiquity, the right to take them "back." This ideological alignment and appropriation has, in turn, distorted the Parthenon's past. Classicism has invested it with its own ideals and projected them onto the past, on the assumption that the modern worship of the building must have had an ancient counterpart. But what that monumental center meant to ancient Athenians, in all its open paganism and militarism, was not something that we would easily sympathize with were we to face it without the mediating layers of modern rhetoric; it was not, in any case, easily convertible into a set of universal values. That process began during Byzantium.

This ideological link between past and present has been strengthened by appearances. The Parthenon certainly *looks* ancient and not Byzantine; or rather, it looks like what we have been trained to identify as an ancient temple rather than a Byzantine church, although it was both, for a thousand years each, and it was more important as a church than as a temple. But even these appearances have, in turn, been shaped by consciously deployed ideology. In the early and mid nineteenth century, the archaeological service of the Greek state, under the direction of foreign and Greek architects, systematically purged the Akropolis of all traces of its post-classical history, producing the artificially "pure" rock that millions of tourists see today. Granted, what they faced on the Akropolis after the city's liberation was a complete mess, but what they embarked

on was hardly a scientific project of archaeological preservation and restoration. They were, in many ways, the modern heirs, or the executors, of Pausanias. Writing about the monuments of classical Greece at a time when Greece was becoming Roman, and suppressing its post-classical history, Pausanias may be interestingly compared to the first intellectuals of modern Greece, who looked back to classical Greece at a time when Greece was, conversely, beginning to shed its Roman (Byzantine) identity in order to become more European. The archaeologists of the new nation effectively made Pausanias' vision of a purified classical past into reality when they cleansed the Akropolis of its post-classical history and created this gleaming purist fantasy.[4]

This ideological recreation, which corresponds to no particular phase of the rock's history, was carried out in the zeal of the early years of the new state and informed by a purist-Hellenist ideology borrowed from the western powers that Greece wanted to impress. It is amazing that the first professional study of the building's Byzantine paintings was not published until 1993, by which time they had disappeared (called "A Lost Monument" by A. Cutler); and that the cubes of the apse mosaic have never been studied, though one reads vaguely that many or most of them are somewhere in the British Museum. This neglect, born of contempt, is an attitude rejected by professional archaeologists today, but the damage has been done. The attendant loss of history has reinforced the view that the Parthenon is in its "essence" an ancient temple that has been reconsecrated as a modern symbol. Alternative interpretations were allowed to lapse if they were not systematically purged, leaving a history that was all classical and, by rights of possession, also modern. The time when the light of the temple shone most brightly has been suppressed historically, ideologically, and archaeologically.

The irony is striking. The Byzantine Athenians, who as Christians were religiously opposed to "Hellenism" and who, moreover, had no commitment

[4] Cf. McNeal (1991); Athanassopoulou (2002); Beard (2002) 101–102; and esp. now Hamilakis (2007) 86–102; for impartial narratives of the restorations and demolitions, see Tanoulas (1987) 461–478; Mallouchou-Tufano (1998) esp. 16–61, 281–282. The demolition of the post-classical remains seems to have occasioned less controversy than the question of the extent to which the ancient ones should be restored (but cf. ibid. 102, 278 for the late nineteenth century); the opinions of W. Mure (1843) in this connection are worth reading (ibid. 296–299). Note, by contrast, that the Periklean architects systematically preserved what they could of the Mycenaean Akropolis, as reverence owed to the past: Hurwit (2004) 84, 86, 159, 240. For Pausanias, cf. Elsner (2001) 18–19.

to preserving monuments, nevertheless preserved the Parthenon virtually intact and found an idealized place for it within their Christian worship. By contrast, the modern state and its functionaries in the nineteenth century, despite their declared devotion to knowledge and scientific impartiality, deliberately obliterated all material traces on the Akropolis of a long period of "barbarous" history that they found offensive, the 2,000 years before AD 1821. This culminated, in 1875, in the controversial demolition of the Frankish Tower, one of the city's most famous medieval landmarks (one of the chief justifications cited was the need to find ancient inscriptions: not a single one was found). Likewise, many of the city's Byzantine churches were also destroyed,[5] and all this, as in so many other countries, was done in the name of modernization. Modernity has presented itself in many ways as the rightful heir of the classical world and has generated narratives that exclude Byzantium. And yet, looking back now, it is not clear whether medieval "barbarism and superstition" caused more damage or showed less respect to the physical remains of antiquity than have modern interventions and progress. In the case of the Parthenon, at least, the answer is clear: the most destructive period of its history was between the late seventeenth and the late nineteenth centuries, when it was bombed, shot at, dismembered, sawed into pieces, stolen, and then purified with cement and iron. The Parthenon cannot handle any more such irony, and thankfully it is now finally in the hands of humanists who are also true professional conservators.

To conclude, too many negative conclusions have been drawn from an ignorance rather than a lack of sources (e.g., that Byzantine Athens had no real history) or from the reluctance to see in the sources what is repeatedly asserted on *a priori* grounds cannot be in them. We should be skeptical of all histories (of the Parthenon, Athens, classicism, archaeology, historical self-consciousness, and so on) that jump from late antiquity to the Renaissance. This schematic and all-too-familiar narrative will have to make room for the distinctive ways in which Byzantines (and others) grappled with the fundamental problems. Garth Fowden has noted that

> There are roads out of antiquity that do not lead to the Renaissance; and although none avoids eventual contact with the modern West's technological domination, the rapidly changing balance of power in our world is forcing even Western scholars to pay more attention to non-Latin perspectives on the past.[6]

[5] Moschonas (1996) 153. [6] Fowden (1993) 9.

Certainly he has in mind here fields further afield than the Parthenon. But the point is still valid, and all the more interesting in that it applies to something as canonically "classical" as the Parthenon. What remains to be further explored is a fascinating, unique, and unknown period in the history of Christian Hellenism, a period whose belated discovery may hopefully ensure that it is also not complicit in the narrative projects or the nationalist rhetoric of modernity.

Appendix: the Little Metropolis

One of the most perplexing monuments of medieval Athenian classicism is the so-called Little Metropolis, a church whose exterior consists almost entirely of reused ancient and (mostly) Byzantine blocks and sculpted elements arranged more or less symmetrically (Fig. 36). The use of *spolia* was nothing new in Byzantium but the scale in this instance was without parallel and unique artifacts are difficult to interpret, there being nothing to compare them to. Scholars have posed various theories. One ascribes the church to "medieval superstition." The arrangement was supposed to "neutralize the power of demons" held in the sculptures. Fear, according to this interpretation, rather than any aesthetic consideration, was the motive.[1] However, there is no evidence from the entire history of Byzantine Athens for the belief that demons inhabited or were in any way linked to ancient monuments, and many sources do survive where we would expect such a belief to have been expressed if it was at all prevalent. The general attitude seems to have been one of reverence and local pride.

We do not know exactly when this church was built. Some of its Byzantine elements can be dated to around 1200, though most of the *comparanda* for some of them figure in monuments that date from the Latin period.[2] The church is often ascribed to Michael Choniates because of his classical interests, or more loosely to the learned bishops of that age, which is just within the realm of chronological possibility (though it requires that some elements were spoliated from recently built churches). It is difficult to believe that Bourtzes, Hagiotheodorites, and Choniates, men who lived in the Propylaia and performed the liturgy daily in the Parthenon, feared demons. In his writings, Choniates shows no awareness that there were demons in Athens. I, at any rate, feel that the "demonological" view of Byzantine culture has been accorded a prominence by historians that it does not deserve and has traditionally been used as yet another means to cast Byzantium as oriental and benighted, in some cases to justify the

[1] Maguire (1994a); the initial publication was Michel and Struck (1906). The literature on *spolia* is enormous, but behind for middle and late Byzantium. A notable exception is Papalexandrou (2003); in general, Kiilerich (2006).

[2] Kiilerich (2005) 103–104.

36 Panagia Gorgoepikoos, also known as the Little Metropolis (Athens).

appropriation of classical antiquities by the Enlightened nations of the West.[3] Far stronger arguments will have to be advanced than the (alleged) "apotropaic" use of circles and crosses.[4]

A different, more theological, interpretation of the monument has been proposed by Helen Saradi that accords better with our historical reconstruction of medieval Athenian classicism, namely that the placement of the pagan *spolia* expresses figuratively the inclusion of pagans in God's plan for salvation. This fits the generous attitude of the empire's Hellenizing elites toward the ancients in the later Byzantine period as well as the established tradition in Christian Athens of interpreting ancient religion

[3] The politics of demonology cuts both ways: whereas European travelers have exploited it to denigrate modern Greece and justify appropriating artifacts from them, e.g., Leontis (1995) 60–62 for ca. 1800, folklorists have used it to prove Hellenic continuity, e.g., Stewart (1991) 5–6, 122–125 (and note the absence of antiquities on the chart at 165). It is possible that the superstitious fear of ancient art was more prevalent in the early Byzantine period, when it is certainly attested, e.g., Saradi (2006) 378–380, and then subsided (or became more of a hagiographic topos).

[4] Kiilerich (2005) 103, 111 notes that not all the pagan elements bear crosses and that even those may have been carved long before the construction.

in terms of the new faith, a tradition that began, as we saw, with none other than St. Paul.[5]

But a recent discovery by Bente Kiilerich will surely change the terms of the debate. Through solid detective work, she noticed that one of the inscriptions incorporated in the church is among those recorded by Kyriacus of Ancona on his first trip to Athens, only he did not find it built into a church but rather on "a large marble base." This means that the Little Metropolis was built after 1436, very possibly after 1460 as well, at which time the Parthenon had been converted into a mosque. Kiilerich argues that the many (over fifty) crosses on the church's exterior

> some of which were probably inserted into the ancient images long before the stones were reused in the church – were hardly due to superstitious minds fearing pagan imagery; rather, they were aimed at the Ottomans as a visual manifestation of religious identity. The Little Metropolis was a monument to Athens and the Orthodox faith in the form of a church that displayed tangible physical evidence of Athens' Byzantine and antique culture.[6]

One can say exactly the same about the Parthenon's thousand-year Byzantine adventure.

[5] Saradi (1997) 416–419, who doubts the apotropaic explanation; for other interpretations of the church, see Tanoulas (2004) 316–317. Superstition is losing its appeal: see Papalexandrou (2003) 56, 61–62, who prefers memory, appropriation, and transformation; and 59–60, 70 on the Little Metropolis. For Hellenism in the twelfth century, see Kaldellis (2007a) c. 5.

[6] Kiilerich (2005) 111. For the inscription in Kyriacus, see Bodnar (1960) 179.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
CFHB	*Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1873–)
JöB	*Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*
PG	J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca*

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